

# A History of India

K. Antonova, G. Bongard-Levin, G. Kotovsky

In Two Books

BOOK

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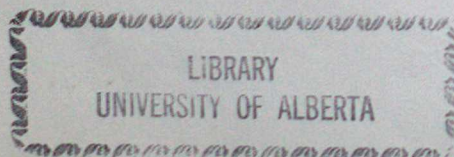
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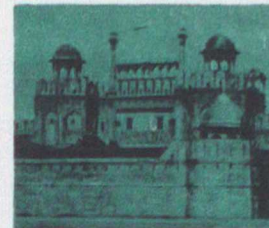
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# India in Modern Times

K. Antonova, G. Kotovsky





## THE BRITISH CONQUEST OF INDIA (EIGHTEENTH CENTURY)

### THE FALL OF THE MOGHUL EMPIRE

It was in the eighteenth century that the Moghul empire fell and lost its independence. The balance of power between the Indian states and the European trading companies operating in India under the auspices of their mother countries, was constantly changing to the Europeans' advantage. In the sixteenth century all that the Europeans had had in India was a few strongholds and warehouses; in the seventeenth century followed trading stations and settlements, while in the eighteenth century they began to subdue the Indian states. On the other hand it should be noted that by the eighteenth century the Europeans were confronting not the Moghul empire from which they had secured trading privileges by means of force and gifts, but merely individual states that were competing between each other and turning to the Europeans for help in feuds with their Indian adversaries.

The decline of the empire which had begun as early as Aurangzeb's reign proceeded at a far more rapid pace after his death. The war of succession which broke out between his three sons ended in victory for the elder—Muazzam, who acceded to the throne in 1707 in Delhi as Bahadur Shah (1707-1712). This aged and indecisive ruler undertook campaigns only against the Sikhs, who were being led by Banda Bahadur since the murder of Guru Govind Singh. This resolute man attracted to his cause many "embittered Indians from the lower castes" (to use the words of the chronicler) and captured Sirhind. Then with an army of seventy thousand he gained control of the Saharanpur district, and laid siege to Lahore, but failed to capture it. Bahadur Shah led his army out against Banda in person and in 1711 the Moghul forces captured the Sikhs' main stronghold Sirhind, and pushed them back to the foothills of the Himalayas.

A new rivalry for the throne broke out between Bahadur Shah's sons after his death. This time it was the least talented claimant who emerged victorious—Jahandar Shah (1712-1713), who however was supported by a highly competent advisor. After no more than a few months, however, Jahandar Shah was ousted from power by his nephew Farrukhsiyar (1713-1719) and murdered in prison. Practically speaking, the country was at this time being ruled by Farrukhsiyar's advisors—two brothers from the Sayyid clan of Barha, a line that had been famous for its fighting traditions ever since Akbar's day.



Meanwhile Banda had embarked once more on military action in the Punjab, but was unable to take Lahore because he lacked artillery. Farrukhsiyar sent an army out against the Sikhs and they were besieged in the fortress of Gurdaspur. Hunger forced the defenders to surrender. After forcing their way into the fortress the Moghul troops massacred those within. Banda and his supporters were captured and subjected to a lingering death in Delhi.

Farrukhsiyar now sought to rid himself of the Sayyid brothers, but was defeated by them. After that the Delhi throne was for a short time held by Bahadur Shah's two infant grandsons, one after the other. Finally his third grandson acceded and assumed the title Muhammad Shah (1719-1748) after "removing" the Sayyid brothers with the help of a clique of courtiers. However Muhammad Shah himself had no thought for anything but the pursuit of pleasure. His lavish court and also the maintenance of the army devoured tremendous resources. Everything possible was exacted from the peasants; virtually no norms were laid down for the collection of taxes. Many peasants abandoned their holdings to escape the tax burden, joining the army or setting up their own detachments to plunder the surrounding countryside, daring even to approach Delhi. The economy was in a state of collapse. The empire was losing region after region in relentless succession.

In 1713 Aurangzeb's governor in Bengal, Murshid Quli Khan, drove out of his province his official successor sent there by the Great Moghul; he also stopped taxes to Delhi and set up a new capital which he named Murshidabad. Between 1714 and 1718 Murshid Quli Khan was able to annex Bihar and Orissa to Bengal.

Although the new state of Bengal formally acknowledged the sovereignty of the Moghul ruler, in practical terms it was completely independent, refusing, as it did, for example, to grant British merchants the privileges, that Farrukhsiyar had guaranteed them in 1717. The Moghul governor in the Deccan, Asaf Jah, also broke away from the empire and set up the independent state of Hyderabad with a capital of the same name near the fortress of Golconda. Asaf Jah and his successors on the throne of Hyderabad, who assumed the title Nizam, fought against the Marathas to hold sway over South India. Finally, in 1739, the Moghuls also lost control over Oudh which had also become an independent principality with its capital in Lucknow. Oudh endeavoured to extend its territory at the expense of the Rohilla Afghans, tribes that had settled to the north-east of the Delhi region. By this time the Moghuls were merely in control of the Agra-Delhi area.

The main claimants to power over the whole of India were the Marathas. While a power-struggle was going on in North India among the various claimants to the Moghul throne, the Marathas not only established themselves in Western India, but also brought their fighting detachments to Central India. Since there were no organised armies to oppose them in that area, the Marathas attacked the towns

and small settlements, on the pretext that they were collecting the *chauth* and *sardeshmukhi* that were due to them. In Maharashtra a struggle for the throne was going on between Shahu, son of Sambhaji, who had been freed from captivity in Delhi, and Tara Bai, the widow of Rajaram, who had been ruling in the capacity of regent during Shahu's absence.

Meanwhile the Peshwa (first minister), Balaji Viswanath (1713-1720), assumed a position of influence. He virtually concentrated all power in his hands, thus laying foundations for the Maratha dynasty of Peshwas. The various members of Shivaji's dynasty still ranked as rajahs but they were not entitled to leave the town of Kolhapur where they were living. For supporting the Sayyid brothers, Balaji was given a firman (mandate) to collect the *chauth* and *sardeshmukhi* from six of the southern *subahs* (provinces) of the Moghul empire. This meant that the Marathas' plunder had been legalised. They sent out their tax collectors escorted by military detachments to gather all they could find and to torture rich men in order to find out where their treasures were hidden. The inhabitants of the *subahs* concerned would scatter in fear at the approach of the Marathas.

By the third decade of the eighteenth century the Marathas were in control of extensive territories in Central India. As a result four large Maratha principalities were set up: these were respectively ruled by the Bhonsla dynasty based in Nagpur, the Sindhias based in Gwalior, the Holkars based in Indore, and finally the Gaikwars based in Baroda. They were all to some extent subject to the central administration in Poona, the headquarters of the Peshwas. This league of Maratha principalities soon developed into a medley of different peoples and tribes, in which the Marathas themselves constituted the ruling minority. The Maratha army became a motley crowd with no vestige of ideals or a national spirit left. The position of the peasants in the Maratha principalities was extremely difficult, and all manner of new taxes were introduced. In practical terms the league of Maratha principalities turned into a feudal empire, that differed from the Moghul empire in its heyday only insofar as it was less centralised.

Baji Rao I (1720-1740), Balaji's son, encouraged the Marathas to look northwards, since he was sure that if the Marathas could seize Delhi then they would be in control of the whole of India. He used to say: "If you strike at the trunk of the withering tree, the branches will fall off themselves." However when the Marathas were marching on Delhi from the south, troops of the ruler of Persia, Nadir Shah, invaded India from the north. The demoralised troops of the Great Moghul, Muhammad Shah, were unable to withstand his onslaught. While Nadir's army actually met with no resistance up to its appearance in the vicinity of Delhi, the main battle between the Moghuls and the Persians was fought at Karnal not far from Panipat. Since the outcome of these hostilities was not decisive, Nadir Shah gave orders for his troops to prepare for home. At that juncture he



was visited by envoys from Muhammad Shah who came to sue for peace. After this Nadir Shah set off for Delhi where he spent two months, organised a massive slaughter and received a firman granting him the right to take over the lands of the Moghuls north of the Indus (i.e. the territory that makes up modern Afghanistan) before returning home loaded down with Moghul treasures and booty. After Nadir Shah's departure, Delhi, now devastated, was at the mercy of marauders. The mass of inhabitants fled and the feudal lords sought refuge at the court of other nobles, mainly in Lucknow (the capital of Oudh).

The Afghans were not long under Persian rule, and after Nadir Shah had been slain in 1747 they set up an independent state ruled over by Ahmad Shah Abdali (Durrani).

Ahmad Shah had been in Delhi with Nadir Shah's army. Having seen how weak the Moghuls were, he decided to conquer the whole of India. He invaded India five times: in 1748, 1750, 1752, 1756-1757 and 1758. The main resistance which he encountered was not that of the Moghuls, but that of the Sikhs. They forced him to withdraw by cutting off his supply lines from Afghanistan.

Meanwhile the Marathas under the leadership of Peshwa Balaji Baji Rao (1740-1761) were moving northwards. There they encountered the troops of Ahmad Shah. In 1761 the decisive battle between the two contestants for sway over India took place at Panipat. The Marathas were routed to a man. The best Maratha commanders fell during the battle and the Peshwa himself died of wounds. However it had been no easy victory for Ahmad Shah. He was compelled to withdraw to Afghanistan in order to muster fresh forces after the considerable losses incurred. Troubles at home detained him and after his death in the midst of feudal strife Afghan incursions into India came to an end.

After Ahmad Shah's armies had withdrawn from India, the Sikhs immediately proceeded to drive out the Afghan garrisons from the Punjab, where they soon succeeded in setting up an independent state. By this time there was no longer any doubt that the centre of the economic activity in the sub-continent was not the Agra-Delhi area but Bengal and South India. In the course of these widespread hostilities the country had been bled white and was in no position to resist the incursions of European colonialists.

At the same time in South India constant fighting was going on between Hyderabad and the Marathas, between the independent state of Madura and the state of Arcot, a vassal state of Hyderabad. The state of Mysore that had been set up from the ruins of Vijayanagar also joined this struggle.

At the end of the seventeenth and during the eighteenth century there was a sharp drop in the number of peasant-landowners, who from the sixteenth century onwards had been known as *mirasdars*. During this same period the tenants in village communities were also beginning to secure rights as tax-paying owners of land. The rights to

land enjoyed by various categories of peasants were being levelled out: the peasants were bound to their holdings by their tax obligations but could hand them down to their descendants. The rayats' right to their land was subject to their paying the revenue demand. The community organisation that was based on a combination of the crafts and tilling of the land did not disappear; but the revenue demand was now charged on the village as a whole even in areas where that had not formerly been the practice. This dovetailing of community organisation and the virtually absolute power enjoyed by the feudal lords in the rural areas led to a redistribution of land in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries according to the principle: those who could pay more, received more land. As the taxes continued steadily to rise land often became a burden for the peasant, and he sought to rid himself of any "surplus" thus freeing himself at the same time from additional taxation. The emergence of community headmen and scribes as small-scale feudal lords became more widespread; the revenue farmers also appeared in this capacity, coming to the communities from outside and receiving the post of headman. The advance of the commodity economy did not undermine the feudal economic order, but rather made the villages more dependent upon the feudal lords and led to an intensification of feudal exploitation and the conservation of village community type of organisation.

After the death in 1748 of Asaf Jah, the ruler of Hyderabad, a war of succession broke out between two of his sons, Nasir Jang and Muzzafar Jang. The European trading companies, now in control of small territories adjacent to their ports, intervened in that struggle. There then flared up what in practical terms amounted to trade wars between the two strongest European powers of that period—France and Britain. These were the wars that were to result in the conquest of India.

### European Trading Companies in India

Trading with India constituted an important yet complex undertaking for European merchants. Usually the traders set up companies that were supported by their governments. Essentially the rivalry was not between individual traders but between their governments. The Portuguese expeditions to India were equipped and financed by the Crown; the Dutch and British set up companies that were granted charters by their governments. The British East India Company that was set up in the early seventeenth century, for example, was gradually granted more and more rights by the British government. A number of charters passed by the British government represented landmarks in the consolidation of the Company's position in Britain: the Cromwell charter of 1657, the charter of 1661 which entitled the East India Company to declare war and conclude peace, the charter of 1686 which gave the Company the right to mint coins, to initiate court



martial and maintain its own army and fleet. In 1698 a group of private merchants set up another East India Company and when the two companies eventually merged in 1702, this step was given official approval by an Act of Parliament in 1708. From that date on the activities of the Company in India developed at a rapid pace.

Jahangir had hopes of setting the British and Portuguese off one against the other, and to that end granted the British merchants the firman to free trade within the Moghul empire. However after the British had established themselves along the coast, the Moghul rulers time and again made attempts to drive them out. In 1687, for example, Aurangzeb tried to drive them out of Bengal. In 1690 a large Moghul army laid siege to Bombay (the island given to Britain by Portugal in 1661 as a wedding present from Catherine of Braganza, when she married Charles II) which became the main stronghold of the British possessions on the western coast. However this action of the Moghul rulers ended in failure.

In the eighteenth century the British trading company was the richest in India. Its main base was Madras on the Coromandel coast that the British had acquired in 1639-1640 from the local ruler. By the middle of the eighteenth century the British had built the Fort St. George and a harbour there, which developed into a populous and rich port town.

In Bengal it was Calcutta that gradually emerged as the main base for the British company's activities. Calcutta had been set up on the River Hugli (a western tributary of the Ganges) in 1690, and a fort had been built there as early as the seventeenth century to protect the Company's warehouses; it was known as Fort William, in honour of William III, then King of England. The East India Company in Bengal was administered from Fort William. The Company was also regarded as *zamindar* of three villages around Calcutta.

In 1717 Farrukhsiyar granted the British the firman to thirty-eight more villages. The wares of the Company were made exempt from customs on condition that the British paid into the Moghuls' treasury an annual tribute of three thousand rupees; in addition it was laid down that the *dastak* (special permit) issued by the head of the trading station allowed the passage of British cargoes without any customs duties. From then on wares from Bengal came to account for an increasingly large proportion of British exports from India. The Company's revenue immediately increased from 278,600 pounds in 1717 to 364,000 pounds by 1729.

Communities of weavers started to settle around the trading stations of the British East India Company in Calcutta, Dacca, Cassimbazar and several other places in Bengal. In Calcutta alone there were some eight thousand weavers working for the Company, living in the outskirts known as the Black Town. The Indian agents of the East India Company distributed materials to the weavers and placed orders for the fabrics that sold well in the European markets. Often these agents not only represented the interests of the European

trading company but also acted in their own name, as middlemen buying up the craftsmen's wares.

The expansion of British trade caused the Nawab of Bengal serious alarm. By this time he had become a virtually independent ruler and feared that the towns and fortified trading stations would in time become British strongholds, from which it would be difficult for his government to drive them out. The Nawab accused the Company of monopolising the whole of the country's trade, saying that the private trade engaged in by its officials exceeded even the Company's own trade.

The main exports of the British Company from Bengal were cotton and silk fabrics, raw silk, saltpetre, sugar, opium, indigo, clarified butter and vegetable oil and rice. The Company had large sums of money at its disposal and endeavoured to buy the commodities it required wholesale. The purchase of rice for example was arranged in the following way. Long before the beginning of the harvest the Company's officials, at the recommendation of powerful Indian bankers, who assumed the role of middlemen, distributed various sums to Indian merchants, who in their turn gave advances to the buyers, and through them to the peasants. This meant that the rice crop would be bought up in advance at a cheap rate.

The native British agents (*gomashas*) employed similar methods in their dealings with the craftsmen virtually enslaving them by means of advances.

The Nawab of Bengal, Alivardi Khan (1740-1756), granted the Company a number of privileges in return for the financial help given him during the war against the Marathas, when they invaded Orissa. However the Nawab feared the growing influence of the British merchants, who now owned trading stations employing tens of thousands of weavers, worked in co-operation with Indian money-lenders, bankers and traders and were gradually ousting Indian merchants from maritime trade in the East.

The French East India Company, sponsored by the statesman Colbert, had been organised in 1664 after the other European companies. The French Company had been granted sweeping rights: it held unchallenged sway over the territories it conquered, it could administer justice and mete out punishment to all inhabitants within its possessions and was entitled to declare war and make peace as it saw fit. The French government promised to protect the Company against all enemies and to guard its vessels. However during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it was subject to feudal regulation: King, the General Controller, the Chamber of Commerce, the Minister for the Colonies and the Fleet, all interfered in the affairs of the Company, issuing their various instructions. This prevented it from functioning efficiently.

The Company was headed by a Board of Directors, some of whom were appointed by the government. In practice the affairs of the Company were decided by the General Controller who was appointed



by the government and his assistant—a special commissioner. The main shareholders of the Company were court favourites, and their henchmen administered the Company's possessions and commanded its army and fleet. Endless feuds and squabbles went on both among the directors and between the administration and the investors. The Company's affairs degenerated into complete chaos and bribery became a widespread practice not only among its staff in India, but in France as well.

The centre of the French possessions in India was the port of Pondicherry on the Coromandel Coast, which had been secured in 1683. The second most important town in French hands was Chandernagore (known also as Chandranagar) in Bengal—the main base where fabrics woven in Bengal were stored to await the arrival of French ships.

In the eighteenth century the French Company was trading on a far smaller scale than the British. Its main exports to France were cotton and in particular silk fabrics purchased in the south of India. The French government attributed little importance to its eastern possessions and trade. Indeed, one of Louis XV ministers is reputed to have said that were he King of France he would have renounced all the colonies for the price of a pin.

The French Company had no powerful fleet at its disposal and its army consisted of convicts; the officers were often men who were insufficiently versed in the arts of war and officerial rank was often bought for money.

The French and British companies were the most influential of the European companies in India. Apart from their trading stations and settlements in India there were also the Dutch Company founded in the seventeenth century on the Coromandel Coast (based in Negapatam) which also owned settlements in Bengal (the main trading stations being in Dacca and Chinsura), and the Danish Company founded in 1676 and based in Serampur. However the Dutch and Danish companies did not play a role of any decisive importance.

### Indo-Russian Relations

In the seventeenth century when India's maritime trade was entirely in the hands of the European companies, the Indians started to organise more and more caravan links with their northern neighbours. By way of Persia and Bukhara Indian merchants had made their way to Astrakhan and by the 1640s were well established there. In 1649 a special walled-in Indian House was established where the Indians set up their stalls and dwelling-houses, and later even a Vishnu temple. Indians from Astrakhan also traded in Moscow and at the Nizhni-Novgorod (Makaryevskaya) fair, dealing mainly in Oriental (Indian and Persian) wares, despite all attempts on the part of their Russian rivals to prohibit their travelling from Astrakhan to other Russian towns. In Russia's trade with the Orient, commerce

with India was only second in importance after that with Armenians from Julfa (Isfahan) who were chiefly merchants of the Shah of Iran (i.e. traded in official state wares from Persia), while the Indians acted mainly in the capacity of private merchants, moreover those trading on a large scale (some of whom were carrying on trade worth thousands of rubles).

In the seventeenth century the tsarist government made several attempts to set up direct trading and diplomatic links with India, but failed to do so due to the difficulties attendant on travel through some of the Eastern countries. Two Russian embassies sent to the court of Shah Jahan—under Nikita Syroyezhin in 1646 and under Rodion Pushnikov and Ivan Derevensky in 1651—were detained en route by the Persian authorities. Another embassy under Muhammed Yusuf Kasimov from Bukhara got as far as Kabul, but was not permitted by Aurangzeb to go any further, and it was only a trade mission under Semyon Malenky which succeeded in 1695 in reaching Delhi, Agra, Surat and Burhanpur. It was granted a firman written out in Turkic by Aurangzeb ensuring the right to free trade. However Malenky died while in Persia before he reached home.

In the eighteenth century the Indian colony in Astrakhan continued its mercantile activities. However ties with India itself were cut off and the Indians could only trade with Persia and to some extent with the Caucasus. Meanwhile the Indian merchants continued to devote much attention to money-lending activities, for the tsarist government supported their activities in this sphere even when the borrowers included highly placed Russian officials. In the eighteenth century the Indians living in Astrakhan set up an Indian trading company in Russia, whose commercial activities were carried out on a wide scale. In their turn Russian merchants with the patronage of the tsarist government drew up on several occasions plans for companies to trade with India, yet because of the difficulties encountered on land routes to India none of these plans were ever realised.

Since there were no Indian women in Russia, the Indian merchants married Tatar women. In Astrakhan the children of these marriages were known as *agrijans* (evidently derived from the Turkic *ogly*, meaning "son"). Gradually the Indians were assimilated by the local population and in the 1840s the tsarist government confiscated as an escheat the remaining property of the Indian trading company.

### THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN THE BRITISH AND THE FRENCH FOR INDIA (1746-1763)

It was the French East India Company which made the first attempt to set up a colonial empire in India. The governor of Pondicherry, Joseph François Dupleix, began in 1740 to form detachments of Indians placing them under the command of French officers. This was how the first Sepoy detachments came into being, detachments that



fought so well that in 1746 the British also began forming Sepoy detachments.

In 1744 war was formally declared between Britain and France over the Austrian succession. The war spread to India, when a French squadron under La Bourdonnais approached Pondicherry.

Dupleix had his Sepoys board these ships and La Bourdonnais after disembarking them took Madras by force. However soon differences flared up between the bourgeois Dupleix and the noble La Bourdonnais as to what should be done with conquered Madras. La Bourdonnais, who had taken the town with vessels he had built, saw Madras as his personal booty and promised the British to give it back to them for a large sum of money. Dupleix insisted that the port be razed to the ground so as to undermine once and for all British influence in that part of India.

As a result of these differences La Bourdonnais took his ships away from India. Stranded without a fleet, Dupleix was not able to engage in effective hostilities against the British.

In 1748 in accordance with the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle the French government returned Madras to the British without destroying its fortifications, in return for certain concessions in Europe. The results of this decision made themselves felt the very next year, when war broke out between the British and French trading companies in India.

This time Dupleix intervened in a dynastic struggle that started up after the death of Asaf Jah in 1748 between his two sons Nasir Jang and Muzaffar Jang. In order to help the latter, one of his relatives Chanda Sahib was dispatched from Pondicherry with a detachment of 500 Frenchmen and 2,000 Sepoys. Muzaffar was placed on the throne and Chanda Sahib was made Nawab of the vassal state of Arcot. Thus the whole south-east of the Deccan peninsula was now in the hands of the French.

The British realised that this situation implied a serious threat to their position in India and joined in the war, providing help for Nasir Jang in Hyderabad and Muhammad Ali (son of the former Nawab) in Arcot. Muzaffar Jang was killed by the insurgent feudal lords. Then Bussy, the commander of the French detachment in Hyderabad, placed on the throne an infant son of Nasir Jang (who also fell prey to murderers) and forced Hyderabad to sign a so-called subsidiary alliance according to which the Nizam (ruler of Hyderabad) undertook to hand over for the maintenance of French detachments (or for their "subsidy" as it was then called) four rich districts on the Coromandel Coast, that had become known as the Northern Sarkars—provinces. (Later similar subsidiary alliances in the hands of the British colonialists were used as an instrument of political subjugation of India. The British administrators intensified the tax-load to which the Indian population was subjected in the areas under their control, reducing them to ruin and demanding more and more lands for the upkeep of their troops in the service of Indian

rulers.) In this way the French succeeded in consolidating their position in India once more.

Only the powerful fortress of Trichinopoly (Tiruchirappali) known as the key to South India was still in the hands of Muhammad Ali, a protégé of the British. All attempts on the part of Dupleix to capture this fortress ended in failure. During an unsuccessful siege of Trichinopoly the French protégé, Chanda Sahib, was killed.

Bussy did not have sufficient funds to maintain his detachments. Meanwhile because of the military action virtually no Indian wares were making their way to France and India had become a source of French losses rather than revenue. Shareholders started demanding the cessation of hostilities and the French government hoped that an end to the struggle with the British together with the concessions they had made to the British in India would help to preserve peace between the two countries in Europe. To this end Godeheu, one of the directors of the Company, was sent to India. He signed an agreement with the British complying with all their demands: the Carnatic was made over to Muhammad Ali (1754-1795), the French renounced their hold over the Northern Sarkars, and Dupleix was recalled to France. After that the French government declared that Dupleix and La Bourdonnais were to be blamed for all their defeats in India. La Bourdonnais spent several years in prison and Dupleix was financially ruined and died in France in 1763.

In 1756 the Seven Years War broke out between France and Britain. Hostilities between the two countries raged not only in Europe but in India too. A detachment of troops headed by Lally Tollandal, an Irishman and violent enemy of the British, came to India in 1758. However in the intervening years the British had not only fortified their positions on the eastern coast, but in 1757 they had succeeded in conquering Bengal, which was now sending money and armed men to the help of Madras. This meant that the current situation was not to the Frenchmen's advantage. Nevertheless Lally succeeded in capturing the British stronghold Fort St. David and in laying siege to Madras itself—the bastion of the British possessions. After deciding to concentrate all his forces on this particular objective, Lally summoned Bussy from Hyderabad, which was immediately seized by the British.

The incorruptible Lally, who was abrupt and intolerant, quarrelled with the commander of the French fleet, and the latter removed all his ships from India. He then quarrelled with the Pondicherry board of directors who consequently stopped equipping the French troops besieging Madras. Lally despised Indians in general and used whips to force the Indian population of Pondicherry, regardless of caste, to drag along heavy cannon.

The arrival of an English squadron in the Madras area in 1759 forced Lally to retreat. In two battles at Wandewash the British routed Lally's army and took Bussy prisoner. After that they besieged the town of Pondicherry, which was forced by terrible hunger to



surrender a year later. The fortifications of Pondicherry were razed to the ground. Lally returned to France and the French government used him as a scapegoat for their setbacks in India and executed him.

In accordance with the Treaty of Paris only the five towns that had belonged to France previously were restored to her. France then began to re-establish trade links with India. However extensive territories in the south of India had been lost irretrievably. The scattered French detachments, now in the service of Indian rulers, continued to fight against the British until the end of the eighteenth century. Yet despite isolated military successes these detachments were unable to undermine British domination of India.

Britain's victory over France was due in a significant degree to her economic superiority. Despite the talents and active efforts of many representatives of the French Company in India, France was defeated because she did not have a fleet, an army or financial resources to compare with those at the disposal of Britain and because her government was not as interested as the British government in acquiring colonies.

### The British Conquest of Bengal

At the beginning of the eighteenth century Bengal was one of the most economically developed regions of the Moghul empire. This region had not been directly involved in the political struggle of the feudal lords surrounding the Moghul throne. The basis of Bengal's wealth was mainly cloth production. Commodity-money relations were rather highly developed there. The peasants of this region cultivated various sorts of rice, cotton and sugar-cane. The landlords, known as *zamindars*, were given salaries in return for their collection of taxes and their delivery of the same to the treasury. Yet at the same time they too were obliged to make large money deposits. Soon this system degenerated into one of tax-farming. In the lands which they farmed out the *zamindars* began to wield their power with no thought for principles or legal norms: they collected taxes with the help of their own armed detachments, they administered justice and meted out punishment to the local population and they bribed government officials. At the same time the *zamindars* and tax-farmers were still dependent to a large degree on Murshid Quli Khan, the first Nawab (ruler) of Bengal. When payments were in arrears he could even incarcerate them in the specially dug pit at Murshidabad "full of all manner of abominations" to use the words of a Bengal chronicler.

During the reigns of Murshid Quli Khan's successors the independence of the Bengal *zamindars* became more pronounced. They began to pay off, and what is more the sums which they paid into the Nawab's treasury in no way corresponded to the income they gleaned from their landed possessions. This meant that the rent-cum-tax in the *zamindars'* estates was gradually transformed into rent pure and

simple, while the *zamindars'* estates themselves were inherited, thus developing into private feudal possessions.

Desperately in need of large sums of money so as to consolidate his independence of the Moghul empire and to maintain the lavishness of his court, Murshid Quli Khan on several occasions borrowed money from his treasurer, a rich *Marwari* from Jodhpur, who had come to settle in Bengal. For this Murshid Quli Khan gave him a number of privileges, including the right to mint coins, and also bestowed upon him the title *Jagat Seth* (banker of the whole world). Jagat Seth collaborated with the British East India Company, sometimes gave it credit, but at the same time feared the growth of its influence in Bengal.

By making use of Bengali traders and money-lenders as middlemen the Company was able to acquire the commodities it required: saltpetre, raw silk, sugar, opium, spices and above all cotton and silk.

The wide scale of exports from India in the thirties, forties and fifties of the eighteenth century led to a large expansion of the weaving industry. Weaving was taken up by whole peasant communities and a large proportion of the inhabitants of certain towns, in particular Dacca. The officials of the Company became involved in the internal trade of Bengal; sometimes, under the pretext that they were despatching commodities from one trading station to another, they succeeded in transporting free of duty their own wares.

In 1756 a war of succession broke out in Bengal, after which young Siraj-ud-daula became the Nawab. One of the grandees who had been defeated in the struggle for succession fled to seek refuge with the British in Calcutta. After the British had refused to hand him over to the Nawab, Siraj-ud-daula mustered his army and took first Cassimbazar and then Calcutta by storm.

Immediately after this a detachment was sent from Madras to Bengal by sea under Captain Clive and Admiral Watson—two British officers whose talents had come to light in the fighting against the French in the south of India. Clive made contact with the Indian bankers, Jagat Seth and Omichand, and through them with the Nawab's commander-in-chief, Mir Jafar, whom Clive promised to make Nawab of Bengal if the British emerged victorious. Mir Jafar's treachery at the battle of Plassey on June 23, 1757, enabled Clive with his three thousand troops (of whom only 800 were Europeans) to defeat the army of the Nawab, which consisted of eighteen thousand cavalry and fifty thousand infantry. The day of that battle is regarded by the British as the day when they established their dominion over India.

Immediately after this victory the British demanded from the new Nawab that he pay them an enormous indemnity (close on eighteen million pounds) probably exceeding all the movable property of Calcutta's inhabitants. Resistance on the part of the local population and two attempts by the padishah of Delhi in conjunction with the ruler of Oudh (in 1759 and 1760) to seize Bihar provided the British



with excuses for squeezing money from the Nawabs of Bengal. Henry Vansittart who had been appointed Governor of Bengal in 1760 deposed Mir Jafar and made his son-in-law, Mir Kasim, Nawab in his stead, after the latter had paid the governor and the members of his council 200,000 pounds and made over to the Company the three richest regions of Bengal: Burdwan, Midnapur and Chittagong. This move lost Mir Kasim half his revenue and increased his debts to the Company and individual members of its staff.

This overt plunder of the Indian feudal lords by the British conquerors had most important results. It marked the beginning of shameless pumping of India's riches over to Britain. According to estimates by Indian economists, between 1757 and 1780 Britain drained from India commodities and coins amounting to a total value of 38 million pounds. The loss of power and revenue by the ruling feudal class of India gave rise to a certain degree of restructuring of the country's economic life. In the mid-1760s after the gradual liquidation of the Nawab's court, of the feudal lords' lavish retinues and the now unnecessary cavalry detachments of *jagirdars*, the crafts, oriented to the supply of their needs, fell into decline. This period also marked the beginning of the end for Dacca, that had been the centre for the production of the finest, most costly varieties of cloth. This decline in craft manufacture led to a spread of poverty among the artisans. Craftsmen went to the villages, where they were obliged to rent land on any terms in order to feed themselves and their families. The position of the weavers who were producing the cheaper kinds of fabrics also deteriorated. Not long before the conquest of Bengal the Company had decided not to make use of Indian merchants as middlemen and carried out their dealings with the weavers directly through their agents, the *gomashtas*. After the conquest of Bengal the *gomashtas* acquired tremendous power over the craftsmen, forcing them to produce cloth at prices twenty to thirty per cent lower than those which had been paid by the Indian merchants, and resorting to violence to force the craftsmen to take advances and then surrender their cloth to the Company.

After the victory at Plassey the staff of the Company made full use of their position as conquerors for personal enrichment and the ousting of all their rivals, both among local traders and also among private European merchants. The Company had always allowed its badly paid officials to carry on their own transactions. Using the cover of the edict issued by the Great Moghul in 1717 which had given the British East India Company the sole right to carry on duty-free external trade, its officials began to carry on trade exempt from duty within the country as well. Moreover they started selling their agents *dastaks* or certificates that made the commodities of the East India Company exempt from duty. Using these *dastaks* the agents ousted from trade those merchants who were not co-operating with the British. In the words of a contemporary observer the East India Company in Bengal behaved like a "state in the guise of a merchant".

The energetic Mir Kasim, who had virtually bought his position as Nawab from the British, hoped to become the real ruler of Bengal, and not just a puppet in the hands of the British East India Company. After raising taxes and relentlessly demanding their payment, within two years he was able to pay to the British the whole of the sum that he had promised them at the time of his accession. He then demanded from the officials of the Company that they cease to deal in *dastaks*, that were reducing the country to a state of penury. After his demand was rejected Mir Kasim made Indian merchants exempt from all duties, thus placing them on the same footing as the British. In response to this move the Company officials took up arms and in 1763 they took the town of Patna. When he learnt of this Mir Kasim stirred up a revolt against the British.

All those who were discontent at the excesses of the British in Bengal flocked to the support of Mir Kasim and his troops (the core of which consisted of European adventurers of various nationalities). To his banner rallied peasants and craftsmen and he received financial support from Indian traders and powerful Armenian merchants in Calcutta. In 1763 Mir Kasim succeeded in winning back Patna, but soon afterwards his medley, ill-trained army was defeated.

After retreating to Oudh, Mir Kasim concluded an agreement with the Nawab of Oudh, and also with Ali Gauhar, son of the Moghul ruler, who had fled to safety after the battle of Panipat and later acceded to the throne under the title Shah Alam II (1760-1806). Their combined forces then approached Patna and the British found themselves in a serious situation. However in the decisive battle of Buxar in 1764 the British again succeeded in routing their enemy. Shah Alam surrendered and Mir Kasim fled to Delhi.

After the battle of Buxar no one seriously challenged British domination of the lower Ganges valley. Mir Jafar once more became the subservient Nawab of Bengal. After his death a whole succession of minors among his relatives were appointed Nawab; they were granted large pensions and did not interfere in administrative affairs.

Clive, who had been appointed Governor of Bengal after he had suppressed Mir Kasim's revolt, forced his prisoner Shah Alam to sign a firman granting the Company rights of *diwani* (i.e. financial administration). As a result there grew up a system of "dual government": the local Bengali authorities were in charge of civic affairs—the courts, the maintenance of law and order, etc., while the Company was in control of the collection of land revenue. Initially the whole network work of collectors and the taxation system remained unchanged.

In 1767 Clive left India and in 1773 the question as to the treasures he had plundered in India was investigated by a commission in the House of Commons. Clive was eventually exonerated since he was found to have done important and praiseworthy services to his country.

Once the system of "dual government" had been introduced trade matters were only of secondary importance to the Company and its



officials. The main source of their revenue became the collection of taxes from the Bengali peasants. The sums obtained in this way were used to purchase Indian commodities. This practice was hypocritically termed "investment". While in fact the Company was not actually investing even a penny, it was importing commodities into Britain with the help of this "investment". The money obtained by plundering Bengal was used to finance aggressive wars in other parts of India. In this way the people of India was being forced to finance the enslavement of its own country.

The exploitation of the peasants which had formerly been restricted by the village community customs, now reached excessive proportions. The tax collectors took from the peasants everything they possibly could, not even leaving behind the grain the latter required for their own food. The harvest failure in 1770 turned into a nation-wide famine: millions of people died of hunger, food prices rose to astronomic heights, while the gentlemen of London would not even hear of a reduction in taxes. However in 1771 the Company was obliged to turn to Parliament for a loan. The economic situation in Bengal became the subject of party rivalry between the Whigs and the Tories, and in 1773, after a compromise had been reached between the two, the Regulating Act was passed, which recognised the Company not merely as a trading organisation but as the ruler on Indian territory. The British government took responsibility for the supervision of its political activity. Parliament appointed a Governor-General (it was on this occasion that the post was first established) and four advisers. This group of five men constituted the Supreme Council for Bengal and resolved all matters by a majority vote. In addition a Supreme Court was set up in Calcutta, which was to resolve all questions concerning the inhabitants of that city.

The first Governor-General was Warren Hastings, who from a young age had been serving in the Company. Being well acquainted with local conditions and possessing a knowledge of Persian and Hindi, he proved a valuable assistant for Clive in Calcutta.

Prior to this Hastings served in Madras and introduced certain reforms: he increased the salaries paid to Company officials and introduced a system of contracts for army supplies that accelerated the spread of corruption and the profiteering of Company officials, particularly those who enjoyed the patronage of the directors. In addition, by reducing the number of Indian merchants acting as middlemen and buyers for the Company, Hastings made possible certain increases in the Company's revenue. This move caught the attention of the Company directors in London. Hastings was well aware that his main task was to increase the Company's profits by all possible means. After being appointed Governor of Bengal in 1772, Hastings cut down the pensions paid to the Nawab of Bengal and Shah Alam II, for which Clive had made provision. Then he sold to Oudh the districts of Kora and Allahabad (which Clive had given the Moghul ruler previously) for fifty lakhs (five million rupees)

and made over to Oudh Sepoy detachments under the command of British officers for war against the Rohillas, although the Company had no axe to grind against the latter. In the course of that "infamous war" the Rohillas were routed and their lands made over to Oudh. All these actions served to give Hastings the reputation of a faithful servant of the Company.

In the Bengal Council Hastings was supported by a Bengali Company official named Barwell, while the remaining three members of the Council who had come out from England—Lord Clavering, Colonel Monson and Philip Francis (who was suspected to be the author of a number of open letters published in England and bearing the signature Junius which had caused a great stir on account of their criticism of the government)—were seen as representatives not of the Company but the Crown. They sought to have Hastings replaced, declared his actions incorrect and pressed for his powers to be made over to Clavering. These events echoed the struggle then going on in Britain between the Company and those circles of the British bourgeoisie which were anxious to play a larger part in the reaping of profits from India.

News of the disagreements in the Bengal Council became known to the inhabitants of Calcutta and many victims of Hastings' extortion lodged complaints against him. However Hastings, with the help of a former school-friend, Impey, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, secured a sentence of capital punishment against his principal critic, the rich Brahman Nanda Kumar for forgery that he was alleged to have committed six years previously, when there had not yet been a British court in Calcutta. After Nanda Kumar had been publicly executed no further charges were brought against Warren Hastings. In 1777 Colonel Monson died followed soon after by Clavering, which meant that Hastings now enjoyed unchallenged power as ruler of Bengal.

### The Economic Position of Bengal after Conquest

The seizure of Bengal by the British served to disrupt the economic ties that had existed between that region and other parts of India, and also its trade links with other Eastern countries. Prior to conquest by the British, Bengal had carried on wide-scale trade with the countries of South-East Asia. Now virtually all maritime trade was concentrated in the hands of the British. Internal trade in Bengal was also gradually being taken over by the British. By the end of the eighteenth century Indian merchants were able to carry out large-scale transactions only if they became agents for the British. Indians were being ousted by the British from financial affairs in a similar way.

Prior to conquest the largest and most advantageous transactions carried out by Indian bankers and money-lenders (*shroffs*) were



connected with the remittance of taxes to the treasury in Murshidabad. In 1772 the treasury was transferred from Murshidabad to Calcutta and thus was no longer under the influence of Jagat Seth and his successors. In 1773-1774 Hastings closed the mints then functioning in Dacca, Patna and Murshidabad, in order to intensify and centralise government control over the fiscal system, and Calcutta thus obtained a monopoly for the minting of coins. That was the time when the gradual ruin of the house of Jagat Seth and his family began. It was hastened by the inauguration of three British banks, which issued banknotes and carried out credit and other fiscal operations.

In 1770 the first private British trading agency was set up to take the place of the *banyans* or *banyas*—Indian agents in the service of the British. These agencies gradually came to constitute one of the main forms of exploitation in India by the British colonialists. They were engaged in export and import transactions, tax-farming and money-lending, the transfer to Britain of valuables plundered in India and similar affairs. Powerful Indian merchants and bankers who were ousted from the towns started investing their capital in the purchasing of *zamindari* estates and money-lending in the villages.

Exploitation of artisans was also intensified. In 1775 weavers were forbidden to work for any other clients or to make market production until the work required of them by the Company, or by its individual officials, was complete. The *gomashas* stationed guards in the houses of the weavers to make sure that they did not sell what they made to anyone else. This state of affairs robbed the weavers of their last vestige of freedom. It became a frequent practice for weavers to abandon their houses and leave for the villages, thus swelling the ranks of the tenant farmers who also enjoyed no rights. In 1773 and 1786 weavers' revolts took place in Santipur. In 1787 the weavers of Dacca, and in 1789 those of Sonargaon complained that they were being deceived, beaten and arrested. Salt-workers also lodged complaints that they were being subjected to repressive treatment.

The position of the Bengali peasants was also deteriorating. Clive had left untouched the Indian revenue network and the functionaries who operated it. Hastings, on the other hand, began setting up a British taxation system and devised new methods for exploiting the peasants of Bengal, assuming that the British had now taken over the right to feudal state ownership of land, which had formerly been enjoyed by the rulers of Bengal and which he, as ironically noted by Francis, interpreted as the state's right to bleed the natives dry. Francis, on the other hand, maintained that the only rightful owners of land in India should be the "native landlords", as he termed the *zamindars*. Despite opposition on the part of Francis, Hastings introduced a policy of farming out land on short leases, and this led to extreme impoverishment of the peasants, since the tax-farmers were only interested in obtaining as much money and grain as possible from their tenants. In 1790-1791 land taxes in Bengal,

Bihar and Orissa were increased to almost twice the level they had been fixed at in 1765, the first year that the Company had officially made robbery of the peasants through taxation the main source of its revenue. As a result of this policy a third of Bengal's territory by the end of the eighteenth century had been reduced to jungle. Tigers were roaming where once crops had been grown.

It is not surprising that an endless succession of peasant revolts was the order of the day. The largest of these flared up in 1783 in the Dinajpur district against the tax-farmer Debi Singh, who had resorted to torture in his efforts to ensure that revenue was paid. After assembling near the town of Rangpur, the peasants elected a leader, drove out the local police and sent a petition to Calcutta. On receiving no answer they took up arms. The British troops sent out to the area put down the uprising.

Uprisings on a smaller scale took place in various parts of Bengal in the last four decades of the eighteenth century. Sometimes the peasants were joined by backward tribes from the jungle who had settled in areas that were difficult of access for the British troops. Such was the case with the uprising of the Santals and the revolts of the Chuars. Armed resistance to the British authorities led by the Hindu sect of the Sanyasis continued for many years. On one occasion some Sanyasi detachments numbering several tens of thousands got as far as the very approaches to Calcutta. Hastings sent out against them some regular Sepoy contingents under the command of British officers. In order to rob the Sanyasis of any support and prevent any more peasants joining their ranks Hastings gave orders that every insurgent captured should be executed in his village, that all members of the village concerned should then be made liable to a heavy fine, and the family of the executed men taken as slaves. Eventually Hastings succeeded in routing the Sanyasis at the end of his term in office and in driving them out of Bengal.

### The British Policy of Subsidiary Alliances

In the seventies and the eighties of the eighteenth century the Company's policy was directed not so much to the extension of its possessions in India, as to the consolidation of its power in the territories already conquered and of its influence in the independent states of India.

This latter goal was achieved by making available Sepoy detachments (i.e. battle-worthy units) to those independent states who would agree to conclude subsidiary alliances with the Company.

After concluding an alliance of this kind a state renounced its independence in foreign affairs; it was then obliged to conduct its foreign relations through the Company exclusively, disband any French detachments that might be on its territory and



take no Frenchmen into its service. These two stipulations made it impossible for the states which signed such alliances to free themselves from British influence. Finally in accordance with the subsidiary alliance, the East India Company would send to the state a detachment of its Sepoys, ostensibly for defence against possible attackers. The ruler of the state would take it upon himself to maintain the said detachment, supplying its needs on the scale stipulated by the British. The Company's troops using their right to collect taxes in the areas under their jurisdiction simply plundered them and the state was thus obliged to place new areas at the disposal of the Company or borrow money from Company officials with which to pay the Sepoy detachments. In both cases the state found itself threatened with complete financial ruin. Finally the impoverished state would be incorporated into the Company's possessions under the pretext of its "bad administration".

This policy of the gradual enslavement of the states by means of subsidiary alliances aroused desperate opposition among the population. Sometimes the whole population of an area would rise up in protest against British extortion, and a local uprising would acquire much bigger proportions. That was how things developed for example in Varanasi (Benares) and Oudh.

In 1775 Hastings wrested the vassal state of Varanasi from the ruler of Oudh as payment for the ratification of his right to the throne after the death of his father. The Company assured the Rajah of Varanasi Chait Singh that the extent of the tribute he was required to pay would never be increased. However when further income was required to finance military expenditure Hastings turned to the Rajah with a demand for additional contributions. Finally these contributions reached such a height that the state of Varanasi could no longer pay. Then Hastings came to Varanasi in person to obtain the money. When Chait Singh asked for more time, Hastings gave orders for his arrest. On learning of this, an indignant crowd broke into the palace at Varanasi, massacred British Sepoys that had been placed in the Rajah's service and took Chait Singh off with them. The constant extortion to which they were subjected by the British led to discontent among the local population. Hastings found himself in a critical position. It was only with difficulty that he managed to extricate himself from Varanasi.

The uprising quickly spread through the whole of Varanasi, and even as far as Oudh. The British in trepidation began to muster all the troops they had in Bengal. However the position of the Varanasi feudal lords led by Chait Singh, who had been sending Hastings endless abject entreaties for peace, and the financial help given the British by local Indian bankers, facilitated the suppression of the uprising. Varanasi was handed over to another Rajah, who guaranteed to pay tribute on almost twice the scale as his predecessor, and to use exclusively Company forces both for collecting taxes and in case of war. Powerful *jagirdars* in Varanasi were stripped of their *jagirs*. As a

result of the increased taxes stemming from the Company's extortion, the principality of Varanasi, that had once been thriving, was now no more than a poverty-stricken, ruined land. In 1788 the British Resident in Varanasi declared that in that principality it would appear that at least a third of the land was not being cultivated because of the poor administration of recent years.

Despite the suppression of the uprising in Varanasi in 1781, unrest flared up in Oudh in the following year. The Company had been forcing Oudh to spend ever larger sums on the upkeep of the British troops in Oudh's service and to farm out more and more areas. The insurgent peasants were not supported by the rest of the people of Oudh, and the uprising was suppressed by troops in the service of powerful feudal lords from Oudh. Despite the fact that the British tax burden had brought about a famine in 1784, Hastings did not reduce the tribute demanded from Oudh. In the years that followed it was only the British troops who protected the Nawab from an indignant people harassed by the taxes it was not in a position to pay.

Dissatisfaction was also increasing among the feudal lords, for the Nawab of Oudh was confiscating, under various pretexts, the property of some feudal lords in order to replenish his virtually empty treasury. The Nawab of Oudh himself was now for all practical purposes bereft of real power. The discontent feudal lords rallied together under Wazir Ali, the foster son of the previous Nawab of Oudh then living in exile in Varanasi. Wazir Ali enjoyed the support of those feudal lords who had been robbed of their power by the British in Varanasi, Bihar and Bengal (both Moslems and Hindus), also the merchants of Bengal, including the Armenians of Calcutta, and the armed forces in Oudh. He entered into negotiations with the leader of the Rohillas, with the Maratha prince of Gwalior, and sent representatives to Zaman Shah in Afghanistan, proposing that the latter should invade India; he also tried to make an alliance with the French by way of Muscat. However the British became suspicious of his activities and gave orders for him to move to Calcutta. Wazir Ali refused to comply and stirred up a revolt. This move was premature and the revolt was suppressed before it really got underway. Wazir Ali was banished to Calcutta, Oudh lost large territories in the Ganges-Jumna valley, Rohilkhand and Gorakhpur, in a treaty drawn up in 1801. The Nawab of Oudh was obliged to disband his forces, while the number of the Company's troops in Oudh was increased.

In 1814 when a new Nawab came to the throne the growing discontent of the people forced the government to reduce the land revenue. However, two years later an uprising broke out in Bareilly in protest against the high taxes. It was led by Mufti Ywaz, and it only proved possible to suppress the uprising when special troops were called in. Essentially everything remained as before. The Company found it advantageous to maintain over ten thousand Sepoys at the



expense of the vassal state of Oudh, while the *Nawab* did not object to paying them; after all it was only thanks to the Sepoys that he was able to remain in power.

#### THE BRITISH CONQUEST OF SOUTH INDIA The Formation of the State of Mysore

The strongest resistance to the British penetration of South India was that put up by the state of Mysore. This state in the heart of South India, situated on a plateau bounded on two sides by the Eastern and Western Ghats and by the Kaveri River to the south, made it difficult of access for the armies of its enemies. The long hostilities between the Moghuls and the Marathas had given Mysore the chance to consolidate its strength, lying as it did apart from the arena of the main battles. The numerous mountain rivers in the region and the ample waters of the Kaveri, together with a ramified system of dams and reservoirs, assured rich harvests for the farmers of Mysore. Land revenue was fixed at a more or less moderate level, and craft manufacture was well developed.

Cloth was produced in a number of towns in the state (mainly the coarser varieties), but the main export items were iron bars that were sold all over India. Iron was taken mainly from the sand of the mountain streams which carried down fragments of ore to the plateau. The abundance of timber made it possible to melt down this ore in primitive stoves, and then to make iron and steel by re-forging it time and again in small furnaces. This trade was taken up on a seasonal basis by villagers; during the remainder of the year the workers would be tilling their own holdings or hiring out their services to other peasants. Other major groups of craftsmen were the glaziers, who made glass bracelets, dyers, book-binders, canal-builders and salt-makers.

After a coup d'état in 1761 a Moslem military commander by the name of Hyder Ali (1761-1782) replaced a member of the Hindu dynasty of Vodeyar as head of state. The first task he took upon himself was to reorganise the army. He replaced the previous type of detachments, that had been hired and paid by individual *jagirdars* and that were subordinated only to them, with detachments of warriors and officers that he took on himself. He paid their salaries from the public treasury, while at the same time abolishing the practice of distributing *jagirs*. He started to employ in his service, on a wide scale, European officers (in particular French ones). These European officers succeeded in teaching Hyder's army new standards of discipline and new tactics. Hyder was the first Indian ruler to devote particular attention to infantry as opposed to cavalry: infantry came to account for between 26 and 31 thousand of his 50-55 thousand-

strong army in the field. Of these 20 thousand were regular troops trained on European lines and armed with muskets. Hyder Ali's cavalry was also accountable to a single command and he gave each man an army horse, which encouraged the cavalry to act more boldly in battle. Hyder Ali also had a first-rate artillery, on a par with that of the British, and highly mobile. He introduced a special army department responsible for the organisation of field medical care. His conduct of military affairs was also facilitated by the presence of a well-organised reconnaissance network.

Thanks to these innovations and to the rich resources of Mysore, Hyder Ali was able in a few years to set up an army stronger than all others in the Indian states. Between 1761 and 1764 he undertook a number of wars of conquest. In 1761 for a price of three hundred thousand rupees he acquired the city and district of Sera from one of the claimants to the throne of Hyderabad; then he annexed Hoskote, Dod-Ballapur, Chick Ballapur, Nandidurg, Gudibanda, Kodikanda and a number of other nearby petty principalities. The most important of the acquisitions made by Hyder Ali at this period was Bednore, a large town with a population of at least sixty thousand. It was surrounded by several rings of fortifications and situated in the Western Ghats and thus dominated the Malabar coast and the mountain passes leading from Malabar and Cannara to Mysore. Using the pretext that he was supporting one of the claimants to the throne of Bednore, Hyder Ali seized the fortress and the countless treasures of the palace treasury within, treasures that had been accumulated by whole generations of Bednore's rulers. The town which was renamed Hydernagar was transformed into an important arsenal.

Hyder Ali's troops which then made their way down the Bednore pass to the Malabar coast had little difficulty in conquering the principality of Sunda, a vassal state of Bednore, later known as Cannara, which included the large port towns of Honavar (Onor) and Mangalore. Hyder Ali then went on to rout the troops of the Nawab of Savanur, but he decided not to annex this latter territory, merely to exact enormous war indemnities.

Unlike the Marathas who raided foreign territory and collected *chauth* and *sardeshmukh* from it, Hyder Ali annexed the lands he conquered to his own state. He replaced a whole host of petty principalities by a united and strong state of Mysore, capable of dominating the whole of South India and standing up to the British. However, like all conquerors, Hyder Ali and his army plundered the subject peoples, and later, when he required additional funds to maintain his army, Hyder Ali raised land taxes in the new subject territories. These measures aroused the discontent of the conquered princes and peoples and thus prepared the ground for uprisings against him first in one and then in another area of the Mysore state.

Hyder Ali's territorial expansion inevitably brought him into conflict with two other major forces in the south of India, with the Maratha alliance and with Hyderabad. None of these states had



clearly defined frontiers and all were anxious to extend their possessions at the expense of their neighbours. Many of the petty principalities would fall now to one and now to another of their powerful neighbours, each of which would be demanding tribute as current or previous suzerain. When the Marathas invaded Mysore in 1764 Hyder Ali's forces were defeated twice, after which however he was able to hold them at bay for the price of 350 thousand rupees.

Hyder Ali then proceeded to invade Balam and Coorg (principalities with passes through the Western Ghats). Balam surrendered but the hostilities against Coorg detachments lasted until 1768 when the Mysore army had to make a temporary retreat and conclude peace. Hyder Ali's army penetrated as far as the Malabar coast by way of the Balam pass under the pretext that it was protecting the Moslem merchants *Moplahs* (*Mappilas*). Six thousand of these merchants were butchered in 1765 in the course of a few days by the Nambudiri Brahmans who held all important posts in Calicut, and by the Nairs, warriors and landowners who did not pay taxes but were subject to military service. The Nairs fought only in infantry formation, their main weapons being swords and arrows and they were of course unable to stand up to Hyder Ali's army. In the battle on the banks of the river Anjarakandi the Nairs' army was defeated and Hyder Ali was able to capture Calicut. For the first time a heavy land tax was introduced throughout the Malabar coast area. Three or four months later the Nairs again attempted to uphold their independence. They rose in revolt and defeated the garrisons which Hyder Ali had left behind, confident that the swollen rivers and incessant rains would keep Malabar safe in the meantime from Hyder Ali's army, which by then had reached Coimbatore. Yet despite the monsoon Hyder Ali went back to Calicut which he laid waste with fire and sword. Over fifteen thousand Nairs were forcibly transferred to the centre of Mysore.

Hyder Ali's next campaign against Travancore united against him the Marathas, Hyderabad and the Nawab of Arcot, a protégé of the British. Hyder Ali succeeded in buying off his Indian enemies; however, the British at this stage invaded Baramahal and threatened to break through into Central Mysore, to the capital Seringapatam. On learning of this, the cavalry under the command of Tipu, Hyder Ali's son, made a raid on Arcot, which led to the outbreak of the first Anglo-Mysore War in 1767.

### The First Anglo-Mysore War

After having defeated the French in South India and having conquered Bengal, the British expected an equally rapid victory over Hyder Ali. However after the initial battles in 1767 at Changama and Trinomali Hyder Ali avoided major confrontations. He began to

employ different tactics: he kept moving his troops with great rapidity to new scenes of action, dealing blows at individual detachments and points that were inadequately defended. The high mobility of the Mysore cavalry and artillery in comparison with that of the British Sepoy infantry meant that these tactics brought Hyder Ali success on a number of occasions.

Initially the campaign went well for the British who were able to attack Mysore from both Madras and Bombay. The inhabitants of the Malabar coast, supported by the Bombay army, rose up against Hyder Ali, who was thus obliged to move his main forces to Malabar. Meanwhile the army from Madras occupied all the south-eastern part of Mysore. However the British troops, who were by this time a long way from their supply bases, started to find themselves short of food and lost much of their fighting capacity. Hyder Ali with his best troops now invaded the Carnatic, burning villages as he went and in no time at all reached the suburbs of Madras. The British were obliged to sign a peace treaty, according to which both sides handed back the territories they had captured from each other and took it upon themselves to help the other, if either side should be attacked by a third party.

However, when in 1770 the Marathas attacked the north of Mysore and Hyder turned to the British for assistance, the latter refused it, maintaining that they were already bound by a treaty of friendship with the Marathas.

Before Hyder Ali all the Indian princes had regarded the British as rulers on a par with themselves. Sometimes the princes had come into conflict with the British and sometimes they had concluded alliances with them against internal enemies. In 1770 Hyder Ali was the first to realise that the British represented the main enemy of the Indian princely states and that any agreements with them were out of the question. "...Hyder Ali and his son Tipu Sahib swore on the Koran everlasting hate for the English and to crush them".\*

Hyder Ali managed to buy off the Maratha invaders in 1772; he realised that devastation of the country by combatant armies might well undermine all Mysore's resources.

In order to replenish his empty treasury Hyder Ali raised the tribute he demanded from the vassal princes, particularly from those who during the last Maratha invasion had gone over to the side of the enemy. In 1772-1773 Hyder Ali once again gained control of the Malabar coast and in 1774 he captured the Coorg principality.

### The First Anglo-Maratha War

In the meantime a war had broken out between the British and the Marathas, in which Hyder Ali found himself involved. After the

\* Karl Marx, *Notes on Indian History*, Moscow, 1960, p. 95.



Maratha forces had been routed at the third Battle of Panipat in 1761 the Peshwa's power over the other Maratha princes ceased to be as strong as it had been in the past. The most prominent of the Maratha principalities were now Gwalior (where the Sindhia dynasty was in power) and Indore (ruled by the Holkar dynasty). However during the reign of Madhava Rao I (1761-1772) Maharashtra still played an important role in South India. After the death of Madhava Rao I hostilities broke out among the contenders for power in Poona. One of them, Raghunath Rao or Raghoba, turned for help first to Hyder Ali, who was not in a position to give it, being occupied with his campaign against Coorg, and then to the Bombay Council, with whom he concluded a treaty making over to the British the Maratha lands of Bassein, Salsette and some small islands near Bombay. In addition Raghunath Rao agreed to pay 150,000 rupees a month to maintain the detachment of 2,500 men that was promised him.

However the British forces that invaded the country met with resolute resistance on the part of the united Maratha chiefs. Hastings, in his capacity as head of the British possessions in India, annulled the Treaty of Surat and concluded the Treaty of Purandhar with Raghunath Rao's rival, Nana Farnavis, minister of the infant Peshwa, Madhava Rao II. Under the terms of this treaty the Peshwa undertook to pay 1,200,000 rupees to the Company for its troops to be withdrawn and in addition to cede to the Company territories which brought in a revenue of 300,000 rupees. The island of Salsette also remained in British hands. The Bombay Council did not comply with Hastings' instructions and sent troops once again into Maharashtra in order to ensure that Raghunath Rao came to power.

This army from Bombay soon found itself surrounded by the troops of Mahadaji Sindhia in Wargaon, a mere twenty kilometres from Poona. Its position was most serious, however Mahadaji Sindhia was taken in by a promise that he would be recognised as independent of the Peshwa and he proceeded to sign a convention with the British at Wargaon, according to which the British undertook to give up Raghunath Rao to the Peshwa and return to the Marathas all the territories that they had conquered since 1776. Sindhia then allowed the British army to leave for Bombay. Once the troops were out of danger the Council of the Bombay Government refused to ratify the convention. This led the Maratha leaders, who had been so cruelly deceived, to join forces with Hyder Ali and the Nizam in 1780. The Marathas and Hyderabad agreed to recognise the territories conquered by Mysore as its rightful lands, while Hyder Ali's troops undertook to deal the decisive blow at the British in the Carnatic and take on themselves the brunt of the war. The French promised to assist Hyder Ali, since at that time they were fighting the British in order to retain rights to their possessions in Canada. These were the events leading up to the Second Anglo-Mysore War, the acknowledged aim of which, according to the notes of a British official at the time, was to put an end to British supremacy in India.

At that time there were only two powers in India in a position to stand up to the British conquests, the Maratha alliance and Mysore. However the state of Mysore was the more centralised and cohesive of the two; it had a more modern army and a more ethnically homogenous population in its central regions. This explains why Mysore was in the forefront of resistance to the British invasion of India during the second half of the eighteenth century. However there was one weak spot in Mysore's defences: the peoples of the regions it had recently conquered—Malabar, Coorg and others—were far from content with their lot. The British often stirred up revolts in these areas, which, however, Hyder Ali in his turn suppressed. He kept a careful check on the collection of land taxes in Mysore and would use the whip to obtain money that had been concealed by tax-collectors. His religious policy was also significant in this context. Hyder Ali endeavoured to avoid offending the religious feelings of the Hindus. He was a patron of commerce and crafts and he opened up several armouries that were supervised by European engineers.

### The Second Anglo-Mysore War

In 1780 Hyder Ali invaded the Carnatic at the head of an enormous army, larger than any that had ever seen action before in South India. One part of the army made a surprise attack on Porto-Novo and succeeded in capturing the rich port, while another, led by Hyder's son, Tipu, laid siege to Arcot. A large detachment under Colonel Baillie was surrounded by Tipu's forces and destroyed at the Battle of Perambakam (Polilor), while the commander-in-chief of the British army, Munro, was obliged to retreat from Conjeeveram back to Madras. Soon after, Arcot also fell, which meant that virtually the whole of the Carnatic was in Hyder Ali's hands.

The arrival of reinforcements sent from Bengal under the finest British commander of the day, Eyre Coote, changed the course of the war, coinciding as it did with the signing of an agreement with the Nizam of Hyderabad, according to which Hyderabad was to leave the anti-British coalition and receive in return the district of Guntur (seized earlier by the British). The combined efforts of Coote on land and Admiral Hughes from the sea prevented the French troops (that had sailed from Mauritius) from landing. Coote secured a number of further victories over Hyder Ali's army in 1781 at Porto Novo, Perambakam and Sholinghur.

Uprisings in defiance of Mysore then began on the Malabar coast, in Balam and Coorg. Fearful lest the Dutch should form an alliance with Hyder Ali, British troops captured Negapatam, the Dutch stronghold in South India. British detachments in a surprise attack by night also succeeded in capturing the fortress of Gwalior that had been thought impregnable, and where Mahadaji Sindhia had set up his capital. Sindhia was thus obliged to sign the Treaty of Salbai in 1782,



under which the British recognised him as an independent ruler. The remaining Maratha leaders also abandoned the struggle against the British.

At this moment, when Hyder Ali found himself in such desperate straits, a French squadron under Admiral Suffren came to the rescue and in a sea battle off Madras in January 1782 the French forced Admiral Hughes' battle-weary vessels to retreat. Large British forces under Colonel Braithwaite found themselves unexpectedly surrounded by Tipu's army near Anagudi and were subsequently destroyed. According to the account of an Indian historian, the British army in the south was so weakened by this disaster that for some time it was unable to mount another campaign. While waiting for the French to disembark, Hyder Ali captured the port of Cuddalore, which was to provide a base for the French troops. The French and British fleets engaged in battle on several further occasions, but the outcome of hostilities was never decisive. In December 1782 Hyder Ali died after a long illness. His son, Tipu Sultan, continued in the main to pursue his father's policies and regarded it the main aim of his life to drive the British out of India. He was a capable commander and enjoyed the loyal support of his army.

However at the very beginning of his reign Tipu made a serious miscalculation. He issued a secret order that Hyder's favourite, the Commandant of Bednore, Sheikh Ayaz, whom he strongly disliked, be slain. This order fell into the hands of Ayaz himself, and in order to save his own life, he went over to the side of the British, surrendering Bednore to the Bombay army under General Mathews in January 1783 without a single shot being fired. The loss of Bednore was a dire blow for Tipu. This meant that a route to the very heart of Mysore had been opened up for the British.

Fortunately for Tipu, the Bombay army was the weakest of the British armies in India and Mathews was an incompetent and irresolute commander. After taking over the Bednore fortress, Mathews and his officers seized the enormous wealth that had been stored there. The soldiers also took all they could from the inhabitants of the rich city. As a result of all this the Bombay army was becoming demoralised and Tipu, concentrating all his forces round Bednore, succeeded in capturing the city by starving it out. Mathews capitulated. After taking Bednore Tipu invaded the Malabar coastal region, where he managed to capture a number of forts from the British. In 1783 he laid siege to Mangalore, the last stronghold of the Bombay army on the Malabar coast. It was at this juncture that reinforcements from France under the aged Bussy arrived at Cuddalore.

In July 1783 news came to India of a peace treaty that had been concluded between the British and the French. All the French in India, i.e. not only those who had arrived at Cuddalore with Bussy but also those who had been serving under Tipu and were taking part in the siege of Mangalore, refused to continue fighting against the

British. An attempt on the part of the Mysore army to continue the siege alone, when it also faced the threat of an attack from Sindhia's forces (now that the latter was an ally of the British) ended in failure. On March 11, 1784, Tipu was obliged to conclude the Treaty of Mangalore, under which he undertook to withdraw all his troops from the Carnatic. The British for their part promised to leave the Malabar coast. Both sides also promised to release prisoners of war. So ended the Second Anglo-Mysore War, which had seen such dramatic changes in the fortunes of both sides.

Ever since the time of the Treaty of Mangalore Britain had always been on the offensive in the struggle against Mysore, the side that provoked hostilities and was sure of victory. The effect of the industrial revolution had been making itself felt more and more in her growing military strength. It was in this situation that Tipu changed his tactics. In the struggle against the British he sought new allies among the Moslem rulers. The changed situation in South India goes a long way towards explaining the factors that distinguished Tipu Sultan's internal and foreign policy from those of Hyder Ali.

Not only the British but also Tipu Sultan was aware that their rivalry in South India would lead to another war, and both sides started making preparations. In 1786-1787 Tipu waged war against the Marathas and Hyderabad, and after he emerged victorious he annexed several Maratha principalities. However, despite this victory, he concluded a peace on terms that were rather favourable for the Marathas, for he was afraid of sending them running into the arms of the British. In 1787 Tipu adopted the title of *padishah* in his capital of Seringapatam, thus putting an end to the fiction of power enjoyed by the Hindu Rajah of Mysore.

Anticipating as he did a further war against the British invaders, Tipu turned to France for help. He sent two missions to France, one of which was obliged to return home after getting no further than Constantinople, while the other arrived at its destination in June 1788. Tipu proposed that France should conclude a defensive and offensive alliance with him against the British. Tipu's envoys were given a magnificent reception in Versailles, but the situation in France on the eve of the bourgeois revolution was such that she was not in a position to send any troops to far-away India.

Already in 1784 and 1785 Tipu had sent two missions to Constantinople to the Sultan, appealing thus to a fellow Moslem for help. However Turkey was then embroiled in hostilities with Russia, and hoping herself for support from Britain, which made her unwilling to help Tipu.

Meanwhile more and more uprisings were flaring up on the Malabar coast and in Coorg. In 1786 Tipu had virtually to reconquer the Malabar coast. In 1788 Nair raids on the Mysore garrisons were still going on as well. In 1789 an uprising broke out in Coorg. While Tipu's army was in Coorg, the people of the Malabar coast took up arms; then when the Mysore armies left for the Malabar coast the people of



Coorg once again freed their country from the Mysore garrisons, with the exception of the main fortress.

Tipu had to ignore events in Coorg for developments in Travancore now demanded his attention. In the first half of the seventeenth century Travancore had risen to prominence and developed from a petty principality into a comparatively strong state. The Rajah of Travancore conquered the whole southern part of the Malabar coast, and planned gradually to claim it all for himself, but in this he was forestalled by Hyder Ali. This made the Rajah of Travancore decide that his main enemy was Mysore and he began to seek the friendship of the British. At the time of the Second Anglo-Mysore War he gave assistance to the British army. Fearful lest Tipu should attack him, he took into his service in 1788 under the terms of a subsidiary alliance two battalions of Sepoys. He then began to build fortifications in Cochin, a vassal state of Mysore. At the end of 1789 Tipu's forces broke through these fortifications, but they were routed. However the second attempt to break through the fortifications was successful. The Rajah's army was put to flight. It was then that the British under the pretext of protecting their ally from Travancore invaded Mysore.

### The Third and Fourth Anglo-Mysore Wars

Cornwallis, Governor-General of India (1786-1793), concluded a military treaty with the Peshwa and the Nizam against Mysore in 1790, prior to the war: after victory was achieved the allies of the British would have their former territories conquered by Hyder and Tipu restored to them while the lands that had always belonged to Mysore were to be divided into three equal parts between the Company, Poona and Hyderabad. The Nizam and the Peshwa were obliged to muster 25,000 soldiers each and to fight simultaneously with the British. At the same time Cornwallis made contact with dissatisfied elements in Coorg, Cochin and the Malabar coast region, promising them military help and assuring them that only the most moderate of tribute would be demanded, if they agreed to become vassal states of the Company.

In accordance with Cornwallis' strategic plan, the British troops invaded Mysore from three sides while the Marathas and the Nizam were called upon to devastate the borderlands of Mysore and safeguard the British troops against Mysore cavalry. The combined forces of the allies came to no less than 57 thousand men. Bangalore was taken and laid waste, after which British troops laid siege to Seringapatam. After a siege lasting three weeks Tipu Sultan was obliged to accept the peace terms. Cornwallis also desperately needed that peace, for his troops were badly supplied and plague was rife amongst his draught animals.

In 1792 the Treaty of Seringapatam was signed. Tipu had to pay an indemnity of 33 million rupees and two of his sons were to remain as

hostages in British hands until the sum had been paid in full. The Marathas regained their former lands up to the River Krishna and Hyderabad its former territories between the Tungabhadra and the Krishna. Meanwhile the British annexed Baramahal and Dindigul to their possessions, as well as a large part of Malabar and Coorg, i.e. they now had control of all the passes to Mysore from the Carnatic and Bombay. Yet Cornwallis did not set out to destroy Mysore, resolving rather to let it remain an independent state, a counterweight to the Marathas.

When the war ended, Tipu started to consolidate state administration. He introduced a number of internal reforms aimed at preparing the country for a new war. The first objective was to reorganise the army: the strength of the cavalry was reduced and the size of the infantry increased. Considerable resources were required to pay off the war indemnity and maintain the army and for this reason Tipu increased the land tax by thirty per cent, and trading tariffs and dues by more than seven per cent. The *Padishah* also began to take away the land of minor feudal lords or *palayyakkars* (*poligars*), *jagirdars* and Hindu temples in situations where this did not arouse excessive discontent among the population.

Insofar as Tipu Sultan had been betrayed time and again by Hindu courtiers—supporters of the Rajah of Mysore—the *Padishah* came to view with far more trust the Moslems at his court and it was them that he strove to elevate to the most responsible posts. However his attempts to appoint Moslem governors in the larger districts to control revenue affairs that were in the hands of the Brahmans, led only to an increase in the extent of bribery in a country where corruption was already rife. Tax collectors used to force peasants to make one and the same contributions several times, and bribed the officials employed to control the delivery of revenue money, not even stopping at Mir Sadiq, placed in charge of the revenue department by Tipu. This meant that Tipu's efforts to concentrate the collection of revenue in the hands of the state apparatus and abolish the far-reaching property rights enjoyed by the feudal lords always met with their determined resistance.

Being well aware of the Europeans' technical advantages, Tipu sought to set up in his own country new crafts, in particular those essential to the conduct of military affairs. With the help of French officers he organised the production of cannon and rifles in Seringapatam, but the pace of production (one cannon and five or six muskets a month) was in no way sufficient to satisfy the army's needs. All attempts by Tipu to achieve rapid economic development in the country by despotic methods failed, indeed they only served to exacerbate the country's difficult economic position and increase general discontent: attempts were made to organise state workshops using forced labour; trade was made subject to state control in that merchants were compelled to pay prices for their wares that by far exceeded their actual cost; a state monopoly was introduced



extending to the import of wares from Malabar, and trade with the British possessions in South India was prohibited; men and women were forcibly resettled to new towns erected by Tipu for the glorification of his name in those places where he had scored major victories. Some of Tipu's reforms were only the fruit of his whims and were of no real significance for the country (for example his attempts to force the people to change the style of their dress, to change the names of government departments and offices, of the months and the days, to increase the number of districts or reorganise them, to subdivide the army, etc.).

Despite the failure of many major endeavours, Tipu nevertheless succeeded in refilling the state coffers after a few years, in increasing the extent of land under cultivation and in re-establishing a strong army. As early as 1794 the war indemnity had been paid off to the British and Tipu's sons restored to him. Tipu had again become a strong adversary, and the British decided to attack Mysore.

Again Tipu began feverishly to seek help from other rulers who shared his faith. He turned to Zaman Shah, the ruler of Afghanistan, assuring him that it would be easy to conquer India. The ruler of Afghanistan was tempted by these proposals and also by calls from the former Nawab of Oudh and he invaded the Punjab. However after coming up against the resistance of the Sikhs and learning of conspiracies against him at home, he returned to Afghanistan. Tipu also entered into negotiations with one of the Rohilla leaders.

He also turned to France for help. As early as 1793 Tipu sent a second secret mission to France, but it is not known with whom and to what end negotiations were conducted. In 1795-1796 Tipu sent the French his plans for a secret offensive and defensive alliance between France and Mysore aimed at driving out the British invaders from India. In 1797 he decided to establish closer links with the French in India. In Seringapatam a Jacobin Club was organised, albeit with a very vague programme. In the presence of Tipu Sultan members of the Club ceremoniously planted a tree of liberty and in their speeches on that occasion proclaimed death to all tyrants and wished long life to "Citoyen Tipu". A cap in sansculotte style was ceremoniously placed upon his head. It would appear that Tipu had little idea of what was going on at the time. However he saw that this ceremony served to win him the loyal support of the French detachments and this he regarded as extremely important.

Tipu made one more attempt to enlist French help. He dispatched two secret envoys on board a schooner, one of whom was to bring French troops from the island of Mauritius, while the other was to go to France to seek help. However by the time the envoys reached the island of Mauritius news had arrived of the coup d'état in France and the establishment of the Second Directoire. This meant that there was no sense in sending envoys to France. The governor of the island betrayed the secret of the envoys' arrival and issued a proclamation calling for volunteers in the struggle against the British under Tipu's

banner. However the results of this move to recruit supporters were negligible; a mere 99 Frenchmen set sail with the envoys for Mysore. The British, on learning of Tipu's action and anxious as to the outcome of the Egyptian campaign undertaken by Bonaparte, who was eager to make his way to India and join forces with Tipu, considered that it was now essential to destroy as soon as possible their dangerous enemy—Mysore.

The policy proposed by Lord Wellesley, the new General-Governor of India (1798-1805), met with the complete approval of London. Initially he decided to neutralise Britain's only substantial European opponent in India—namely the French detachment in the service of the ruler of Hyderabad. The Nizam was promised a British detachment in exchange. The British surrounded the French, disarmed them without a single shot being fired and disbanded the detachment after paying out the salaries which the Nizam had owed them. After that Wellesley's army invaded Mysore. Lessons had been drawn from all the mistakes of Cornwallis. This time the British troops were well equipped. Tipu's commanders disapproving of his autocratic behaviour betrayed the padishah. As a result Seringapatam was again besieged by the British and taken by storm on April 28, 1799. Tipu himself fought bravely and was killed in the fray. For several days British troops plundered Seringapatam meeting with no resistance at all.

This victory over Mysore made possible the complete subjugation of India by the British. For thirty years the people of Mysore had been upholding their independence. Their struggle against the British conquerors had been truly heroic. Right up until its fall in 1799 Mysore was the centre of resistance. The final victory of capitalist Britain over feudal Mysore was inevitable. However the long years of resolute resistance from the people of Mysore had obliged the British colonialists to have large military forces constantly at the ready.

After the conquest of Mysore the colonialists did not make so bold as to annex its lands to their possessions; they concealed their domination behind the screen status of a "reduced" vassal state, placing on the throne a descendant of the Vodeyar rajahs.

### The Enslavement of the Carnatic

Events in the Carnatic provided a typical example of the enslavement of a vassal state by means of a subsidiary alliance. Under the terms of the Treaty of Paris signed in 1763, the protégé of the British, Muhammad Ali, was recognised as the ruler of the Carnatic (Arcot). However he possessed no real power and was a puppet in the hands of the British. After the war of 1756-1763 the Company demanded that Muhammad Ali pay military expenses and the required sum was fixed at five million rupees. The new Nawab had no such money at his disposal. Then some of the Company



employees loaned him the necessary sum, demanding in return the right to collect revenue in certain districts. By crafty financial operations the Company employees succeeded in collecting extra high revenue in the districts placed at their disposal and then used this money to make loans to Muhammad Ali at a high rate of interest. Paul Benfield, one of the Company's minor clerks, carried out particularly large-scale transactions. Thus merely receiving a salary of some two hundred pounds a year, he lent the Nawab thousands of pounds, and all attempts by the Nawab to free himself of these debts were in vain. In order to pay the interest on his debts Muhammad Ali resorted to new borrowings. "The lenders (alias *English swindler usurers*) found this 'very advantageous'; it established the 'vermin' at once in the position of large landowners and enabled them to amass immense fortunes by oppressing the ryots; hence tyranny—the most unscrupulous, too—towards the native peasants of these upstart European (i.e., *English*) zamindars! Entire Carnatic ruined by them and the Nabob."\*

Even the conquest and plunder of rich Tanjore by troops from Arcot and those of the Company did not serve to replenish the Nawab's coffers. Attempts by Lord Lindsay, the royal envoy, in 1771 and Lord Pigot in 1776 to put a stop to this predatory plunder of the Carnatic by the Company employees came to nothing: Lindsay was obliged to return to London with no progress to report, while the members of the Madras Council, whose personal interests were at stake in the plunder of the Carnatic and Tanjore, simply locked up Lord Pigot in prison where he later died. Paul Benfield on the other hand returned to England a rich man.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the Carnatic ceased to be a dependent vassal state, becoming the private possession of the Company. For this reason debts to creditors had to be paid henceforth by the Company not the Nawab. It was then that the British Parliament initiated a detailed investigation of the credibility of the loans, as a result of which it was established that 1,300,000 pounds sterling were owing, while a further nineteen million were dismissed as fraudulent demands or unsubstantiated claims. "And 20 years later (in 1805), when the last of the old debts had been paid off, it transpired, as was to be expected, that *Mohammad Ali* meanwhile had contracted a new debt amounting to 30 millions! Then came a new inquiry which lasted 50 years, and cost £1 million before the affairs of the Nabob were finally settled. That was how the British Government—for it was they and not the Company who had held sway [in India] since Pitt's bill—treated the poor Indian people!"\*\*

\* Karl Marx, *Notes on Indian History*, p. 110.

\*\* Ibid., p. 111.

### The Struggle Waged by Coorg and Travancore Against the British

After the fall of Mysore the struggle of the Indian people only manifested itself in a series of isolated actions that were relatively simple to suppress. Even the inhabitants of the regions that had been collaborating with the British previously and had seen them as liberators, now that they were in their power rebelled against the harassment to which they were subjected. Typical examples were Coorg and Travancore.

After Coorg had been made over to the British under the Treaty of Seringapatam (1792) former refugee landlords (*Nairs* and *Nambudiris*) started returning and driving from their holdings the *Moplahs*, who had taken over those lands as mortgagees or had been resettled there by Tipu Sultan. The British authorities approved of these actions hoping that they would lead to the outbreak of feuds between Hindus and Moslems. At the same time the Company raised the land tax and began to farm out the annual collection of taxes to various powerful feudal lords.

In 1793 an agreement providing for the farming out of revenue was drawn up not with the leader of the Nairs, Varma Raja, who claimed this right but with his uncle. This was sufficient to lead Varma Raja to organise a resistance movement against the British. The insurgents drove out the British tax collectors. The Company sent out its own troops against the insurgents on several occasions, but the thick jungle undergrowth in which the insurgents used to hide concealed them from the British so well, as to make the efforts of the latter useless. In 1797 the Coorg forces succeeded in ambushing and routing a large British Sepoy detachment consisting of 1,100 men. After that the Company bribed Varma Raja with an annual pension of eight thousand rupees and he left the movement. Other leaders of the insurgents continued the struggle, but they were obliged to hide in the jungle and restrict their activities to isolated attacks on British detachments and lines of communication.

In 1800 another uprising broke out and Varma Raja again took command. This time the British troops were under an able British commander, Arthur Wellesley, the future Duke of Wellington. In 1802 all leaders of the insurgents were caught and hanged. The British, who now considered the resistance movement wiped out for good, introduced a sharp increase in the revenue and new commutation rates of the tax in kind for one in money terms, that was disadvantageous for the ordinary farmer. The peasants' response to this was a new uprising. The main participants this time were the inhabitants of one particular region in Coorg. They took by storm the major British fort of Panamaram after destroying the garrison. Then they seized the mountain passes, and after attacking the British lines of communication, rallied to their cause people throughout the district as far as the coast. The British authorities were obliged to make



concessions; the land revenue was restored to its former level and other demands put forward by the peasants were met. It was only in 1805 that the colonialists succeeded in putting an end to the uprising. The bulk of the insurgents perished in the final battle.

Then in 1812, when the land revenue was finally commuted to money, yet another uprising broke out in this area. However the troops transferred to the scene from the Malabar coast quickly suppressed the movement.

Events followed a similar course in Travancore. There the struggle against the British oppressors was led in 1808 by the *dalavai* (chief minister) Velu Thampi, who had built up a rebel army of thirty thousand men and eighteen cannon. The inhabitants of Cochin also joined the Travancore uprising. However the British authorities had large forces at their disposal. Two major defeats of the insurgents decided the day and Velu Thampi, on seeing his cause collapse, committed suicide. The British command then proceeded to suppress the uprising with such cruelty that it was condemned even by the directors of the East India Company.

### The Second and Third Anglo-Maratha Wars

The only parts of India that had not been subjugated were the state of the Sikhs in the far-away Punjab and the Maratha states. After the conquest of Mysore (an event to which the Marathas had to some extent themselves contributed) the British were able to move all their troops against the Maratha states. Bereft of all potential allies, the Marathas were not in a position to hold out against their formidable adversary. Thus Tipu's downfall was essentially the harbinger of the downfall of the Marathas.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century feuds between the Maratha princes were particularly rife. They were constantly staging petty intrigues one against the other, thus enabling the British to disintegrate them and subdue them one by one. In 1801 territorial differences between the princes of Gwalior and Indore—Daulat Rao Sindhia (1794-1827) and Jaswant Rao Holkar (1797-1811)—led up to a war between the two, in which each side invaded the other's territory killing and plundering as they went. The armies of both princes had by then been reorganised: cavalry had been replaced as the main force by regular infantry under European officers. However Sepoys under European officers, but subordinated to a high command that had no European training, namely the prince and his feudal warlords, were not in a position to withstand the British Sepoy army. Moreover the British were fanning hostilities between the various Maratha princes.

In 1802 in the battle of Poona Holkar's army completely routed the combined forces of Sindhia and Peshwa Baji Rao II (1796-1818). Baji Rao II fled to take refuge with the British at Bassein and in December

1802 he signed the subsidiary alliance, under which he agreed to maintain in Maharashtra no less than six thousand British troops, on whose upkeep he would spend an annual total of 2,600,000 rupees. In addition he undertook to conduct his country's foreign affairs under strict supervision from the British authorities.

This meant that Maharashtra had actually sacrificed its independence and become a British protectorate. The British troops were then force-marched to Poona where they restored the Peshwa's power. With reference to Poona's suzerainty over the Maratha states, Governor-General Wellesley declared that the treaty signed with the Peshwa was binding for all the Maratha princes. Although Sindhia and Holkar refused to accept the Treaty of Bassein and in the face of the national danger ceased hostilities, they still regarded each other with mistrust and were unable to co-ordinate their activities. This created a severe obstacle in the Second Anglo-Maratha War.

General Wellesley decided to ignore Holkar at the outset and concentrate all his forces against Sindhia. He immediately succeeded in taking Ahmadnagar, where the fortress was thought to be impregnable, and subsequently the crossings in Khandesh between the Nizam's and Sindhia's possessions. Not far from the Hyderabad border, at Assaye, General Wellesley at the head of 5,000 men was confronted by the combined forces of two Maratha princes—Sindhia and Raghuji Bhonsle, ruler of Nagpur. Despite the fact that the Maratha army numbered seven times as many men as the British force, Wellesley attacked it. In the battle that followed Bhonsle's army retreated leaving Sindhia to take the brunt of the fray and this placed victory within reach of the British. Wellesley began to pursue Bhonsle and Sindhia had no wish to rescue his unworthy ally. In the decisive battle that followed at Argaon Bhonsle's army was routed, Nagpur's main fortress, Gawilgarh, was taken. In December 1803 Bhonsle signed the Treaty of Deogaon under which the principality of Nagpur lost its independence, and the province of Cuttack that lay between the territories of the Bengal and Madras presidencies was made over to the British.

Meanwhile Lake, at the head of the British army in the north, captured the fortress of Aligarh, and after winning a battle outside Delhi he took that city and later Agra as well. In these battles Sindhia's forces were under the command of French officers, Perron and Bourquin. After fighting had ceased they surrendered to the British (Perron at Aligarh and Bourquin outside Delhi). The command of Sindhia's armies was now in the hands of the Maratha general, Ambaji Inglia. In the decisive battle at Laswari (Naswari, to be more precise) the Maratha troops fought desperately and the majority of them was slain on the battlefield. Sindhia's army that had been fighting in the north was destroyed. All his lands north of the river Chambal were occupied by the British. After this Ambaji



Ingolia betrayed Sindhia and handed over to the British the capital and the fortress of Gwalior. Thus, on December 30, 1803, Sindhia was obliged to sign the treaty of Surji-Anjungaon according to which he was stripped of all his possessions between the Ganges and the Jumna and also had to surrender Ahmadnagar and Broach. He had to renounce his suzerainty over the Rajput principalities which had been supporting the British in the war, and pay, under a subsidiary alliance, for the upkeep of a British detachment that would be stationed at the border of his territory, but on the British side. The British returned the throne in Delhi to the Great Moghul Shah Alam II, who was old and had been blinded by the Rohillas. He did not wield any real power. The fortress and capital Gwalior, of considerable strategic importance, were to be handed over to the rajah of a small Rajput principality, Gohad.

When Sindhia's forces had been routed, the British demanded of Holkar, in January 1804, that he withdraw his troops from Hindustan and renounce all claims to the right to collect *chauth* in those lands. Holkar refused to accept these demands and tried to conclude an alliance with Sindhia, but by this time the latter was already under British control.

In 1804 war against Holkar began. In the early stages Holkar succeeded in routing a British force in the narrow Mukundara Pass and even to besiege Delhi with the Rajah of Bharatpur. However he was unable to take the strongly fortified city and eventually retreated. At this stage the British army went over to the offensive and Holkar's fortresses fell one after the other. Meanwhile the Rajah of Bharatpur made peace with the British and Holkar fled to the Punjab.

The war against the Marathas required considerable resources and the Company's shareholders were becoming anxious with regard to their dividends. The new acting Governor-General, George Barlow (1805-1807), restored Gwalior to Sindhia and gave Holkar back his possessions south of the river Chambal, hoping that the strength of the two princes would be undermined by their hostilities with their vassals—those Rajput princes who in the previous war had helped the British. Indeed internecine struggle flared up again within Maratha country. Sindhia and Holkar had large armies, but their now shrunken states did not provide the resources for the upkeep of these armies. This meant that the mercenary soldiers lived almost exclusively by plunder. They would attack villages and even towns, torturing and slaying people as they went and destroying everything they could not take away with them.

There was often nothing left for the impoverished peasants but to join the plunderers, known as the Pindaris. They were led by Amir Khan Rohilla, a former commander of Holkar's who had distinguished himself in the war against the British in 1804, Karim Khan who had also been associated with Holkar, Chitu, one of Sindhia's previous commanders, and Wasil Muham-

mad, who had been in the service of the ruler of Bhopal. The army of the Pindaris grew rapidly and eventually the shortage of food and forage began to make itself felt in the devastated Rajput and Maratha states.

British colonialists did not interfere in the Pindaris' affairs. However when in 1816 they attacked the Northern Circars that were owned by the Company, and where as a result revenues immediately dropped steeply, the British authorities decided to end with the Pindaris. First of all in 1817 the British forced the Peshwa to sign another treaty in Poona. He renounced suzerainty over the Maratha princes, ceded the province of the Konkan to the British, and undertook to conduct all dealings with other principalities via the British resident. Nagpur also concluded a subsidiary alliance with the British. Sindhia had no choice but to sign an agreement that obliged him to make his forces available to the British in the campaign against the Pindaris. Moreover he had to agree not to collect tribute from the Rajput principalities for three years, and to cede to the British as a pledge of good faith the fortresses of Asirgarh and Hindia. This meant that the British had now brought to heel all the Maratha princes and started making preparations for an offensive against the Pindaris.

However as soon as a large section of the British troops had left Maharashtra, the Marathas of Poona rose up in revolt. They were joined by Nagpur. At this juncture the British sent out against the Marathas the largest army that had seen active service in India since the wars of conquest began. It consisted of 120,000 men (of whom 13,000 were British) and 300 cannon. The Marathas were defeated in battles at Khadka, Sitabalda, Nagpur, Salia Ghata, Ashta, and Seoni. At the end of 1818 the Peshwa surrendered and the then Governor-General, Lord Moira, on whom had been conferred the newly instituted title Marquess of Hastings, in recognition of his victory over the Marathas, decided to do away with the title of Peshwa, so as to leave no trace of that symbol of Maratha unity. The whole of Maharashtra was then annexed to the Bombay Presidency with the exception of a small kingdom incorporating Satara and Kolhapur, which were given to Shivaji's descendants who had no political influence. One of the leaders of the Pindaris, Amir Khan, agreed at once to disband his army, in recognition of which the British made him a "gift" of the small principality of Tonk; the other Pindari leaders however tried to resist.

Despite a severe cholera epidemic which was rampant in the British army and claimed nine thousand lives the British continued to pursue the Pindaris. The commanders of Holkar's army (now that their leader had gone insane) attempted to give the Pindaris support but Holkar's troops were also defeated in a major battle at Mahidpur. After that the Pindaris broke up into small detachments and were gradually annihilated. Karim Khan surrendered and was



granted a *jagir* near Gorakhpur. Wasil Muhammad committed suicide in a British prison and Chitu perished in the jungle.

The subjugation of the Marathas marked the end of the main chapter in the British conquest of India. The last of the British military campaigns—the conquest of the Punjab—was not to take place until thirty years later.

#### THE POLICIES OF THE COLONIAL AUTHORITIES IN INDIA: LATE EIGHTEENTH AND EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURIES

The conquest of India by the British changed not only the political situation in the country but also the economic one. Unlike earlier conquerors who had settled there and then been assimilated by the local population, Britain, who had embarked on the road of capitalist development, saw India as a setting for the acquisition of riches which could then be sent home to the mother country. Regardless of various modifications in the methods of exploitation used by the British, India always remained an adjunct of the empire's centre.

The export of wealth from India that began during the period of conquest turned into an uninterrupted economic drain which bled India dry and impoverished her. As early as the fifteenth century Afanasy Nikitin had commented on the poverty of the Indian people, but during the colonial period this poverty became even more glaring. The first famine in Bengal after the coming of the British was in 1770 and it took a toll of some ten million lives. From then on famine, often accompanied by cholera, plague or other disasters, became a recurrent feature of India's life.

The people of colonial India were not in a position to bring about radical improvements in their economic position. The whole of the rest of the country's history is characterised by the struggle for independence from the colonial yoke.

During the years of conquest the British exported from India untold war booty obtained by plundering the treasuries of various Indian rulers and feudal lords. After the fall of Seringapatam for example even soldiers from the ranks filled their pockets with precious stones. After British power had been firmly established, the second stage of exploitation began. The main source of colonial revenue was the land tax exacted from the peasants. However all attempts by the British to introduce a system of land revenue that would serve to promote the advance of agriculture ended in failure. This was the case with all their systems of land revenue: permanent settlement in Bengal, the *rayatwari* in South India, *mauzawar* in North India or the village community system in the Punjab. Regardless of the system employed, the colonial power

exacted the maximum possible land tax, and the peasants with barely enough to live on had no resources for improving the agricultural implements and techniques used. In feudal India all revenue systems tended to fluctuate; at times of natural disasters or when prices fell drastically, demand would be lowered, for it was not in the interests of the feudal lords that the lands should go to rack and ruin. Under the colonial government fixed taxes were laid down and these were collected regardless of whatever unfavourable circumstances might have obtained. When there was no alternative, feudal landowners afforded their peasants assistance (referred to as *taqavi* in Moghul India), that was essential if the agricultural cycle was to continue uninterrupted. Colonial officials did not of course regard such matters as any concern of theirs: their duty was to collect revenue. This meant that the position of the peasants in colonial India was even worse than it had been in feudal times.

The experiments conducted by the British authorities who introduced three different land-taxation systems, in search of one that would ensure maximum revenue, cost the Indian peasants dear. The first such attempt was made by Cornwallis.

#### The Permanent Settlement

In 1793 Governor-General Cornwallis suddenly introduced a law providing for permanent settlement, in defiance of the advice of his senior civil servants in Calcutta. In general outline this law implemented the ideas put forward by Philip Francis in connection with the *zamindars*. According to Cornwallis his law provided for recognition of the Indian *zamindars* as the hereditary owners in perpetuity. At the same time the *zamindars* were obliged to pay into the treasury nine-tenths of the land revenue that they had collected in 1790, and this sum was also fixed in perpetuity regardless of the actual rent collected. In cases of non-payment the *zamindars'* possessions could be auctioned. By introducing this law Cornwallis endeavoured to ensure that in the years to come high revenues would be paid into the treasury. He was also anxious to create class support for the colonial regime among the local population by renouncing, in favour of the *zamindars*, of revenues to be obtained due to the expected development of agriculture and the growth in the nominal amount of land rents.

However in practice the law did away with the peasants' feudal rights to land, making it the *zamindars'* private property. When a *zamindar's* estate was sold (the territory from which the *zamindar* had collected revenue formerly was now designated estate) all previous agreements between the *zamindar* and the peasants with regard to the size of land rents were viewed as annulled and the new *zamindar* would be entitled to raise the land rent, if he should



so choose. To use Marx's words: "*Cornwallis and Pitt artificially expropriated the rural population of Bengal.*"\* Cornwallis' law not only did away with the peasants' previous rights of landownership, but also hindered the introduction of any improvements in methods used in peasant agriculture, since such improvements would only have resulted in higher land rent. Agriculture in Bengal started to go downhill, and the peasants of that province became some of the poorest in the whole of India.

It became common practice for *zamindars* to sell their right to collect land rent to sub-tenants who in their turn would sell these rights yet again for a still higher sum. A notorious example of this was provided by the conduct of the Rajah of Burdwan, the most powerful *zamindar* in Bengal. A regular hierarchy of five or six sub-tenants grew up in his estate. Each of these would rent out the land he had leased to another man for a still higher price. This gave rise to a long chain of sub-tenants, whose rights were handed down from father to son.

The revenues obtained through the feudal exploitation of the peasants would be spent by the *zamindars* in the usual feudal pattern, i.e. they would be wasted on unproductive activities (entertainments, the upkeep of a feudal retinue, etc.). At the beginning of the nineteenth century British colonial officials reported that the *zamindars'* incomes were spent on feeding spongers and good-for-nothings, on servants and bodyguards, singing and dancing girls, on large banquets held for the benefit of other *zamindars* from the locality and on hospitality shown to the Brahmins: everything was consumed and nothing set aside for the needs of production, and there was hardly a single village where a *zamindar* or tax-farmer spent money on improvements.

At times the *zamindars* failed to collect the necessary sums fixed for land revenue due to the extreme poverty of the peasants. Hence the enforced sale by auction of *zamindars'* estates for non-payment of revenue became a mass-scale phenomenon. The lands thus sold would be bought up cheaply by Indian agents of the East India Company, officials from the law courts or influential money-lenders. A new strata of *zamindars* grew up that consisted of men living in the towns who exploited the peasants with recourse to old, feudal methods and who saw the possession of *zamindars'* estates as a form of capital investment no less advantageous than money-lending.

With reference to these practices Karl Marx wrote: "*Results of the 'settlement': First product of this plunder of 'communal and private property' of the ryots: whole series of local risings of the ryots against the 'landlords' [conferred on them], involving: in some cases, expulsion of the zemindars and stepping of the East India*

\* Karl Marx, *Notes on Indian History*, p. 118.

*Co. into their place as owner; in other cases, impoverishment of the zemindars and compulsory or voluntary sale of their estates to pay tax arrears and private debts. Hence greater part of the province's land holdings fell rapidly into the hands of a few city capitalists who had spare capital and readily invested it in land.*"\*

The impoverishment of the peasants in Bengal led them to resort to armed uprisings. Sometimes the insurgent peasants were led by former *zamindars*, who had been stripped of their lands. In such cases the insurgent peasants could be sure of the support of the whole district and their movement would become a movement for national freedom. This was the case, for example, in 1795 in Panchet, where for three years the former *zamindar* together with the local peasants stopped a new *zamindar* from taking possession, until the rightful owner eventually had his rights restored to him. Similar developments occurred in 1798 in Raipur and in Balasore in 1799. In 1799-1800 peasants rose up in protest against the introduction of a new land tax, seized several townships and villages and threatened to break into the city of Midnapur. The tax was then abolished and a stop was put to the enforced resale of estates. These uprisings emerged spontaneously, were local in character and thus quickly suppressed. However they reflect the difficult position in which the peasants found themselves (and the old feudal families likewise) after the introduction of Cornwallis' system of land taxation.

Through the introduction of this permanent settlement system the British colonialists provided a legal framework for the process of economic changes which had begun as a result of the conquest of Bengal. The British conquerors had stripped the ruling feudal class of political power and started to modify the socio-economic order of feudal India to suit the needs of the capitalist mother-country.

### The Rayatwari System

At the end of the eighteenth century in the lands of the Madras Presidency the British also introduced a system of permanent settlement. However, in the territories that had been seized from Mysore the colonialists were not prepared to strengthen the hold on land of the feudal lords, who had but recently been fighting against them. For this reason in 1793 a different system of land taxation was introduced there, which later came to be known as the *rayatwari* system. Over the period 1818-1823 this system spread to those parts of the Madras Presidency, where permanent settlement had not yet been introduced.

Under the *rayatwari* system the British colonialists recognised as

\* Karl Marx, *Notes on Indian History*, p. 120.



the lawful landowners not the *zamindars* but the *mirasdars* (i.e. members of village communities in possession of heritable shares) and also all categories of peasants who although they did not enjoy the same rights as the *mirasdars* nevertheless paid land revenue directly to the state. Even before the arrival of the British in some localities certain *mirasdars* emerged as petty feudal lords, and at times a whole village would become dependent on the power of one *mirasdar*. He would collect the revenue from the village, initially in the interests of the state, and later for his own ends, so that he gradually turned into a small-scale landowner whose land was made his own private property under the British. The lower strata of the rural population enjoyed few rights (the major part of the peasants newly arrived from other districts, slaves and craftsmen from the ranks of the untouchables). Before in accordance with local customs they could not be driven from the land for as long as they duly carried out their obligations and paid the leaders of the village community the required rent for their holdings. Now in the majority of cases they were robbed of their rights to the land and became tenant farmers or share-croppers possessing no rights whatsoever. The rents for their holdings could be increased at any time, and they could also be driven from the land at any time.

Under the *rayatwari* system the pastures and waste land which had formerly belonged to the village community were now expropriated by the state. The peasants were thus robbed of the chance to let their animals graze free of charge or to gather brushwood for fuel. Basing their approach on the principle that the land belonged to the colonial state the British authorities started to regard the *rayats* as their permanent tenants from whom they were entitled to demand rents of any amount, i.e. to impose upon them any revenue demand they might choose. In practice this meant that the annual revenue was fixed as the maximum sum that the Indian peasant could pay, only given optimal circumstances. According to the records kept by the Madras revenue department the first attempts to set up *rayatwari* "in almost every instance greatly increased the Government demand upon the country". The peasants were virtually unable to pay so much, and their arrears continued to grow. Throughout the nineteenth century each time the rates of revenue demand were reviewed the British authorities were obliged to cancel arrears and reduce the rate of taxation.

The British authorities in India acknowledged the whole history of land taxation from 1818 to 1855 and later as a history of persistent and just demands for large reductions in the rate of taxation and for the writing off of arrears. This was the result of excessive land taxes demanded from the *rayats*. The main difference between the system in Bengal and the *rayatwari* system was that in Bengal the landlords had been recognised as landed proprietors, while under the *rayatwari* system it had in the main been the peasants. However although the peasants in the south of India were acknowledged proprietors of their

lands, the land itself had by this time lost its value. This was the result of extraction of colonial profits by British capitalists from the Indian population by feudal and later semi-feudal methods.

### The Mauzawar System

In those parts of Central India that had been conquered by the East India Company during the wars against the Marathas and had been set apart as the so-called Upper Provinces of the Bengal Presidency (modern Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh) a system was introduced that came to be known as the *mauzawar* or *malguzari*. It differed from other systems of land administration in that the village community as a whole was taken as the fiscal unit and landed proprietor. However each individual field was assessed and the arrears of revenue even from a single cultivator could bring about the sale by public auction of the lands of the whole village. These lands were usually bought up by officials of the judiciary or the tax department who thus assumed *zamindar* status, and differed from their Bengal counterparts only insofar as the sums which they had to pay into the treasury were periodically reviewed and increased.

### The Economic Consequences of the British Conquest of India by the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century

British rule led in the first place to the decline of the old feudal families, to the disbandment of the feudal armies, the large feudal retinues and staffs of servants; it changed the whole way of life to which the feudal strata of India had been accustomed for hundreds of years. This also affected the position of the numerous craftsmen who had been supplying the needs of the feudal families. In Bengal, for instance, the town of Dacca lost its one-time importance, for the inhabitants had specialised in the production of fine and costly fabrics. Those craftsmen who did not depart for the villages were severely exploited by the Company, since they were not allowed to sell their wares to private merchants both in Bengal and in the south. In the 1790s there were fatal cases resulting from beatings received at the hands of Company agents. If weekly quotas were not fulfilled Company employees threw the weavers into prison without food and water.

Up until the beginning of the nineteenth century cloth had been exported from India to Britain, but this had been done not by the Company as an organisation but by individuals from among its employees in the capacity of private traders. After the beginning of



the nineteenth century no more Indian fabrics were exported to Britain; instead yarn was exported to British textile factories. Another step taken at the end of the eighteenth century was to cut down the brooding of silkworms in Bengal, and also the production of saltpetre and salt. In this situation where crafts were going into a general decline and the number of artisans was being drastically reduced, the only new sphere of production established in Bengal under the British which provided work for the local labour force was ship-building in the Calcutta shipyards. This industry was exclusively under British control. Most of the ships built there were used for trade with China. The Company's stranglehold on economic activities led to the exclusion of Indians from large-scale commercial and fiscal affairs.

Conditions with regard to agriculture, the crafts and commerce in South India were somewhat different from those that had emerged in Bengal. In the south of the country the overall area of cultivated land had decreased, particularly the land previously sown with industrial crops as a result of the wars and devastation; the irrigation systems built before the coming of the British had fallen into disrepair. As for the position of the artisan population, the oppressive treatment of weavers in South India was not as cruel as that found in Bengal since prior to 1818 there had been independent Indian territories around the Madras Presidency, to which artisans could flee to seek refuge. In the trade sphere the *birinjans* (*banjaras*), who had supplied Indian troops with food and bought up the war booty, no longer played such an important role, now that the numerous feudal armies had been disbanded. The Madras merchants from the Chetty caste and the Jainas gradually became compradors and agents of the British merchants. By the end of the eighteenth century the Parsees from Bombay began to play an important role among the traders and money-lenders. The British in Madras were unable to go so far as they had in Bengal towards ousting Indians from large-scale commerce and credit and commercial finance.

Right up until the end of the Maratha wars Bombay was a small British possession and the British had only been able to secure commodities for export there with the help of Gujarati merchants who had settled in the Maratha lands. The British were interested in the comprador services of the Gujarati merchants (and later in those of the Marwari merchants too) and they made available to these middlemen fairly favourable conditions of service. Despite the fact that after the British conquest of Maratha possessions, Gujarati merchants were no longer able to engage in the advantageous practice of revenue farming and transfer in Maharashtra, they intensified their activities in other spheres. They subjected the peasants to exploitation and enslavement, became partners in British firms, secured agricultural produce and craft articles for export under contract, and obtained supplies for the population of

Bombay and the British army. Later, during the first three decades of the nineteenth century, Gujarati merchants started to act as middlemen for the sale of British commodities at local Indian markets. They exported opium to China from Malwa and cotton to Britain and built ships in their own shipyards. The compradors of Bombay were able to secure a rather great deal of capital and this paved the way for the growth of new trading houses. Right up until the 1840s money-lending remained in Indian hands.

### The Structure of the Colonial Administration

As India gradually became a colony, the Company's policy came more and more to be determined by the results of the struggle for securing the British industrial bourgeoisie a share of the colonial profits. This found its expression in the growing role of Parliament in India's administration. The Charter of the Company was renewed approximately once every ten years. Each time this event was marked by fierce political struggle in Britain.

The first intervention by Parliament in the affairs of the Company in 1773 found expression in the Regulating Act passed that year. Under the terms of that Act it was not the Company but the Crown which appointed the Governor-General, the members of the Bengal Council and the Supreme Court in Calcutta. In 1784 when the Charter next came up for review, merchants, whose access to India was impeded by the Company's monopoly of trade, spoke out against the Company, as did the landed aristocracy indignant at the political influence of the "nabobs" (the term used for men returning from India with plundered wealth and who then purchased rotten boroughs so as to become eligible for Parliament). Opposition to the Company was also voiced by the Whigs who held that the close ties between the Company and the Crown threatened the very foundation of British freedoms, and also progressive elements in Britain who had noted that the Company kept going on bribery and that it was foisting upon the land a spirit of corruption. The Fox bill proposed by the Whigs did not get through Parliament and Fox himself lost the premiership to William Pitt.

Pitt's India Act that was passed in 1784 provided for the semblance of the Company's permanent power, while in actual fact all the really important problems of Indian administration were placed at the door of the Control Council, appointed by the British Cabinet, which gradually turned into a sort of Department for Indian Affairs. However the highly lucrative right of patronage (appointment to all civil and military posts) was retained by the Company's directors.

The Whigs who had been defeated in 1784 when Fox's bill had been rejected, decided to institute proceedings against Warren



Hastings by way of revenge. The proceedings began in 1788 in the solemn setting of the House of Lords and lasted eight years. Britain's finest orators Edmund Burke and Richard Sheridan undertook the prosecution and they were provided with material by Ph. Francis well acquainted with the seamy side of the Company's activities in India. Hastings was accused of cruelty, injustice and corruption. Practically speaking it was the Company which was in the dock. In defiance of the wishes of those who had initiated the proceedings the material brought forward at the trial shed light on the methods used by the British to lord it over the Indians and exploit them during the period of primary accumulation.

However for precisely this reason the British bourgeoisie, which reaped the fruits of India's colonial exploitation, could not allow any indictment to be pronounced against Hastings and the Company. Any condemnation of Hastings would have been a condemnation of the British policy of conquest and plunder in India. Hastings was acquitted on all charges.

Later the question as to the administration of India became the subject of parliamentary struggle when the Company's Charter came up for renewal in 1813. At that time Mysore and the main Maratha territories had been conquered, the Second Anglo-Maratha War had ended and the preconditions for the exploitation of India as a most rewarding market had been created. This explains why the British bourgeoisie as a whole came out against the Company's trading monopoly. The Act of 1813, without affecting the Company's privileges with regard to the administration of India, abolished its trade monopoly with the exception of the tea trade with China. At the same time the Control Council's role as the body of parliamentary supervision over the political activities of the Company was enhanced. This meant that India from a colony of the Company was becoming on an ever larger scale a colony of the British bourgeoisie as a whole.

Further changes in the position of the Company were instituted in 1833. The Act of 1833 introduced on the initiative of the ruling Whig Party upheld the Company's right to administer India, but made it subject to further government control by introducing an official appointed by the Crown to the Bengal Council. His special responsibility was to elaborate legislation for the whole of India. The first Law member was the liberal historian T. G. Macaulay (1800-1859). However the criminal code which he evolved was not implemented.

The apparatus for the colonial oppression of India was organised gradually and the process involved no radical changes. When the trading Company became the virtual government of India and it found itself faced by completely new tasks, it did not set up a new apparatus for the implementation of these tasks, but merely adapted the existing one. The trading network gradually developed into a bureaucratic machine for the administration of an enormous country. It was a

cumbersome, clumsy machinery and in a number of cases it merely served to impede the work of administration. Despite the strict regulation of all functions it provided ample scope for the arbitrary behaviour of colonial bureaucrats and in addition devoured tremendous resources. There were administrative bodies of the Company in both India and Britain. The Company in Britain was headed by a Court of Directors, elected by the assembled shareholders, each of whom had between one and four votes, depending upon the value of the shares he owned. In 1832, for example, 474 influential shareholders were in control of the Company's affairs, since they owned more than half the Company's total shares. Marx noted that "the Court of Directors was merely a *subordinate organ* of the British financial magnates".\* An important source of income and also of influence for the directors of the Company was the right of patronage. Appointments were made by directors for sums of money, political influence or a seat in Parliament. The Court of Directors was subdivided into committees which sent to India highly detailed instructions relating to all important questions of colonial policy and answers to the missives received from the Presidency Council.

This complex machinery for the administration of India was extremely cumbersome and slow-moving. Letters from India took between six and eight months to reach England, and after that it could take several months if not years to receive an answer by the time a question had been discussed in the Court of Directors, by the Control Council and the differences between these two bodies had been ironed out. In the meantime the situation in India might have changed radically. This meant that in practice all day-to-day questions were settled by the governors of the Bengal, Madras and Bombay presidencies and their Councils.

Each presidency was entitled to conduct an independent correspondence with the Court of Directors and make public its decisions, which after their ratification by the Supreme Court of India remained in force throughout the whole of the presidency concerned. This meant that different laws were in force in Bengal, Madras and Bombay which gave rise to awkward problems in commercial, industrial and other civil affairs. The British bourgeoisie demanded that the laws be unified for the whole of British territory in India. It goes without saying that the high posts in this administrative machinery were offered to the British. Indians were only taken on for the most menial of appointments.

An important factor in the context of the colonial administrative apparatus was the Sepoy army. It was with the help of that army that the British had conquered India, and now with its help once again the British were able at this new stage to hold the country in check. In 1830 the army numbered 223,500 men. After the Third Anglo-Maratha

\* K. Marx/F. Engels, *Werke*, Band 9, S.185.



War (1817-1819) India was not beset by war for thirty years, and only a small part of the army was involved in wars outside the country's borders. However the British did not disband their Sepoy detachments, which performed virtually the police functions required in the country. Sometimes the Sepoys were sent by the British to help in the collection of revenue but more often than not for the suppression of all types of unrests, i.e. instances of opposition to British rule in India.

An important role in the apparatus of oppression in India was that assigned to the judicial system, in which bribery and corruption were rife. The testimony of witnesses that played an important part in the legal proceedings was easily bought and extorted. In civil affairs the legal bureaucracy constituted a major evil, for cases were dragged on for years on end, and in the meantime the ill-defined classifications or denials of peasants' property rights gave rise to endless complaints. The inefficiency of the legal system helped bring on the collapse of the village community for it favoured the peasant outsider, who would buy a holding in a village but fail to comply with the general demands of the community, and also the arbitrary rule of police officials, appointed by the authorities, in rural areas, whom the peasants feared more than robbers. This British policy, aimed at destroying the village community and encouraging private ownership of land, served to intensify the exploitation of the peasantry.

#### THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF INDIA IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

After the industrial bourgeoisie had consolidated its position in Britain the economic development of India came to be moulded more and more in the interests of that bourgeoisie. India was to be gradually turned into a market for British commodities and a source of raw materials for British industry.

Britain's customs policy served to encourage British exports to India on account of the low export tariffs, while high import tariffs stood in the way of the import of Indian craft articles to Britain. A duty of between two and three and a half per cent was payable on imports of British cloth into India. The import duty on Indian cloth coming into Britain was between twenty and thirty per cent. As a result India was forced to start importing cloth instead of exporting it as before. A similar course of events was to be observed with relation to other commodities. The British customs policy was such as to make the import of steel obtained from Sweden and Russia into India profitable, while the small smelting works that had been set up by a British engineer in Porto Novo proved unprofitable and had to close down after a few years, despite conditions that would at first sight have appeared ideal (open-cast mining, an ample supply of timber, easy access to port facilities, etc.). Ship-building in Calcutta was to

suffer a similar fate, for the ships that were built there could not rival those produced in Britain. It was only in Bombay, where ship-building was in the hands of the Parsees associated with the Company, and came in useful for the Company's trade with China, that this line of production continued to thrive till the middle of the nineteenth century.

Although British fabrics were sold at a lower price than local ones in India, by the middle of the nineteenth century they were only in wide demand in the towns and certain rural localities situated near the ports. Indian craftsmen who had been deprived of their previous markets were obliged to sell their hand-woven fabrics at the same price as that asked for British manufactured ones. This led to a sharp drop in artisans' living standards: in the Madras Presidency, for example, the gross income of a weaver dropped by seventy-five per cent between 1815 and 1844. In the 1820s the import into India of British industrial yarn began and by the middle of the century this yarn accounted for a sixth of all cotton goods imported to India. The position of the weavers was made still more difficult by the merchants and money-lenders who secured the yarn for the weavers. In 1844, for example, sixty per cent of weavers were heavily in debt to the merchant middlemen.

By making use of and intensifying feudal methods of exploitation of the peasantry the British were able to derive raw materials from small peasant holdings without having to trouble to invest virtually any capital beforehand. It is possible that this accounts for the fact that plantations were not developed in India (apart from those set up in the thinly populated hill regions of Assam in the middle of the nineteenth century). Coercive contracting was widely practised for the purchasing of opium poppies and indigo; this system turned the peasants who grew these crops in their holdings into virtual serfs. The "indigo planters" crippled the peasants with advances and then took the whole of their crop at the arbitrarily fixed and extremely low contractual price which meant that the peasants were never able to pay off their debts. Debts of parents would be handed down to children. Each planter kept bands of cutthroats who kept a check on the peasants and if they should run away either brought them back or made off with peasants working on neighbouring plantations. The peasants responded to these lawless methods, plunder and violence with recurrent "indigo revolts" that kept breaking out between the 1780s and the end of the nineteenth century. Sometimes the peasants were able to assert their demands after such revolts. But this state of affairs ended only when chemical dyes were invented and the cultivation of indigo became an unprofitable undertaking.

At the end of the 1820s British planters started encouraging the peasants of Bihar to increase their cultivation of sugar-cane, while at the same time in Berar the Company was attempting to introduce long-staple cotton, silk-worms were imported into Bengal from Italy, coffee and tobacco were planted in Mysore. However all these



attempts to adapt the Indian economy to the role of supplier of high-quality raw materials achieved little because of the peasants' low living standards, which prevented them from abandoning their traditional methods of farming. The Indian cultivators were often obliged to sell their produce in order to pay their taxes and land rent at prices that bore little relation to the actual cost of production. In the 1820s and 1830s, in the wake of the mass-scale revision of alienated rent-free land, the overall taxation in the Madras and Bombay presidencies was raised and likewise the land rent in Bengal, insofar as the *zamindars* began to play the role of money-lenders in the villages and take grain as payment of interest on debts. There was no need to look far for an explanation of the fact that famine struck various parts of the country seven times in the first half of the nineteenth century, taking a toll of approximately one and a half million lives.

The expansion of India's trade links with world markets led to the growth of port towns and to brisker trade contacts between them and the interior of the country. By the middle of the nineteenth century India's first railways had been built and railway repair shops had been set up, new port installations had been erected, work had started on a telegraph network, postal communications had been improved, existing irrigation canals had been repaired and new ones built. Thus the pre-conditions for the accelerated assimilation of India by industrial capital were being created (particularly during Lord Dalhousie's administration—1848-1856). In India itself, new trading houses were being set up, in particular by the Indian comprador bourgeoisie, first and foremost in Bombay and Calcutta; they possessed capital running into millions and conducted their commercial and financial activities along European lines.

The thirties, forties and fifties saw the emergence of an Indian industrial bourgeoisie and the first manufactories were set up at almost the same time as the first factories—a British jute factory near Calcutta and Indian cotton mills in Bombay. However the emergence of this Indian industrial bourgeoisie proceeded at a slow pace and against difficult odds. Despite the fact that India was drawn into world trade and new economic links had appeared, the level of commodity-money relations and commodity production in agriculture as a whole was still very low. Moreover development was not uniform. Commodity-money relations in Bengal, the presidency administered by the British for almost a hundred years, and indeed in the rest of North India, set up as a special province called North-West Province, were developing more rapidly than in the internal regions of the Bombay and in particular the Madras presidencies.

In general the economic policy of the colonial government in India was one of ambivalence: on the one hand, there was encouragement for the development of new economic regions and new communications while village communities were on the decline, on the other, feudal exploitation of the peasants via taxation was being intensified

and private ownership of land was being consolidated, so that landowners were renting out their land to share-croppers and reducing the peasants to the position of little more than serfs. On the one hand, India was being turned into a source of raw materials and agricultural produce for Britain, a development which was preparing the soil for the emergence of capitalist production in that country, while, on the other, various types of feudal practices and obstacles in the path of national production were holding back the development of India's economy.

#### THE FINAL STAGE OF THE CONQUEST OF INDIA

In the second half of the eighteenth century the Punjab stood aloof from the developments that were determining the course of events in India. At that time there were twelve Sikh *misl*s or associations of warriors in the territory of the Punjab, which were ruled over by *sardars*, who had been military leaders of the Sikhs during the wars against the Moghuls and the Afghan conquerors. A very small part of the lands of the Punjab were in the hands of local Moslem and Hindu feudal lords who had survived the period of the Sikh uprising.

Each *misl* was a small principality in its own right, although the *misl*s were considered to constitute a single whole—the possessions of the Sikh Khalsa, i.e. community (the word is derived from the Arab word *khalisa*—clean). Gradually this word began to acquire another meaning too, it came to be used for the leadership of the army. Later the army Khalsa began to oppose the Sikh princes. The *sardars* ruled independently and united only for joint campaigns after discussing them in advance at the council of their leaders.

Insofar as the *misl*s were headed by Sikh feudal lords they came more and more to resemble ordinary Indian states. Between 1765 and 1799 a fierce struggle took place between the *sardars* for supremacy as they all strove to extend their possessions at the expense of their neighbours. In the course of this rivalry and during the resistance to the Afghan ruler, Zaman Shah, who had invaded India on several occasions at the very end of the eighteenth century, the Sukarchakia *misl*, led since 1797 by Ranjit Singh, achieved a position of prominence. When he came into possession of Lahore in 1799, Ranjit Singh (1799-1839) adopted the title of Maharajah and for a number of years waged a struggle to unite the whole of the Punjab under his leadership. The peasants flocked to join Ranjit Singh's army, for they had been suffering during the internecine struggle of the *sardars* and were also afraid of the Company appearing on their horizon.

By the 1820s a strong Sikh state had been set up in the Punjab under Ranjit Singh. The lands of the *sardars* had been declared state property, and those situated in the centre of the Punjab the domain of



Ranjit Singh himself. After expanding his territory to incorporate Kashmir and part of the Afghan lands, Ranjit Singh was in a position to distribute *jagirs* to those who would commit themselves to military service and to allot part of the lands to the revenue farmers for a high deposit. With large resources now at his disposal, Ranjit Singh was able to lighten the tax load his people had to bear, and at the same time reorganise his army along European lines under the supervision of French officers, mostly Napoleon's former commanders. In the main the army consisted of peasant infantry; these former members of village communities had great stamina and possessed high fighting qualities.

The unification of the Punjab promoted the development of crafts and trade, particularly in areas through which the caravan routes passed, although in the interior barter in kind was the main form of commercial transaction.

After Ranjit Singh's death there followed a period of decline for the state: powerful *jagirdars* and provincial governors (in particular those of Multan and Kashmir) sought to break away, while at the centre of power there was bitter rivalry between various feudal cliques. There was a rapid succession of different Maharajahs, until Dalip Singh, Ranjit Singh's son, still a minor, acceded to the throne. In this power struggle the leading Sikh commanders had fallen.

At this stage the army of the Sikh state entered the political arena. Through the regimental committees or *panchayats* it began to exert a decisive influence on the administration of the country. The *panchayats* virtually seized the reins of power, but the army was still under command of the Sikh feudal lords though they were supervised by the *panchayats*. Of major influence among the warriors of the Sikh army was the teaching of the *Namdhari* (those that took the Name) sect or the *Kukis* (Clamourers). The members of the *Namdhari* sect called upon the faithful to return to the initial, puritanical and democratic version of Sikhism and opposed the luxury indulged in by the Sikh nobility. Anxious to get free from the influence of the *panchayats*, the feudal lords of the Punjab took steps to provoke war with the Company.

The East India Company which had been defeated in the war to conquer Afghanistan in the years 1839-1842 decided to restore its prestige by completing its conquest of India. In 1843 after the battle against the emirs of Sind at Hyderabad (on the Indus River) Sind was annexed. A *rayatwari* system was introduced in the Upper Sind while the *zamindars* were recognised as the legitimate landowners on Lower Sind. The annexation of Sind thus presented to the British the setting up of yet another bridgehead for attack against the Punjab.

In 1845 the Anglo-Indian authorities declared war on the Sikhs. The Sikh army fought bravely in battles at Mudki and Firuzshuhur in 1845, and at Sohraon in 1846, but each time it was betrayed by its commanders, feudal lords, who at the vital moment withdrew their

forces or fled to safety. As a result the Punjab was seized and the Sikh state lost a number of important regions.

Fearful of a possible uprising, the British continued to treat Dalip Singh as the rightful ruler, although the authority of his Regents Council only extended to the Lahore region and Peshawar. A concession was made to the valiant Sikh peasants in that the land tax was reduced a little and the *abwabs* that the Sikh *sardars* had been collecting were abolished. However attempts to unseat the governor of Multan and march in a British detachment sparked off an uprising in 1848 which spread to the north-west borders of the Punjab. In the battles at Chilianwala and Gujarat British troops won the day despite heavy losses. The Punjab was annexed. The state of Jammu and Kashmir were handed over to Ghulab Singh, former commander and powerful *jagirdar* of Ranjit Singh, who accepted his status as vassal of the Company.

In the early years after the conquest of the Punjab the British did not change the structure of the village communities, although they did concede to prosperous tenants of community land the revenue to so-called occupancy rights (i.e. the right to work their holdings in perpetuity on condition that the same rents continued to be paid). Throughout the Punjab revenue in kind was commuted into a money tax. This obliged the landowners to sell their produce on the market, brought about a fall in food prices, a deterioration in conditions for the peasants and increased the influence of the money-lenders. The Sikh feudal lords, whose rights of ownership had been consolidated, provided a bastion of support for the British colonialists.

#### ANTI-COLONIAL PROTEST

The colonial authorities were so convinced that British domination of India was firmly entrenched that they decided gradually to do away with the Indian states by setting up a system of direct British administration throughout all Indian territories. One means of achieving this end was the doctrine of lapsed estates, according to which if a ruler had no sons his foster children would not be allowed to inherit his domain. In the years between 1848 and 1858 the states of Satara, Nagpur, Jhansi, Sambalpur and others were wiped out in this way. After the deaths of the Rajah of Tanjore and the Nawab of the Carnatic (Arcot) these titles were abolished for good. In order to pay off the debts of the Nizam of Hyderabad, the most developed cotton-growing area, Berar, was taken away from the state. From 1831 onwards the Mysore state came under direct British administration, although the Rajah received a pension, while the descendants of Peshwa Baji Rao II were denied even that. Finally at the beginning of 1856 Oudh was wiped off the map on the pretext that it was being badly governed.



When their power and titles were abolished the former princes disbanded their courts. As a result members of the former court administration lost their livelihood, craftsmen found themselves penniless now that the nobles and the princes' army no longer required their services, revenue demand was increased, and the peasants found themselves in a worse position than before, for the British government made no allowances in cases of bad harvests, nor did it provide *taqavi*. Finally the reduction in the status of Indian princes to that of common British citizens was a blow to the Indians' national pride. This meant that discontent was rife among broad strata of the Indian population, and on frequent occasions peasant uprisings were led by former feudal lords. Another source of discontent was the attitude adopted by the colonial administration to Indian tribesmen, the majority of whom had previously not been made to pay revenue but instead had carried out periods of military service or guard duty, to ensure the safety of the roads. The British held that this function carried out by the tribesmen was superfluous and they made their land-holdings subject to taxation. This move was responded to by uprisings of the tribesmen all over India.

During the whole of the first half of the nineteenth century various parts of India were the scene of uninterrupted anti-colonialist activity on the part of the peasantry, the tribesmen and the dispossessed feudal lords. The feudal lords—*palayakkars*—in the Northern *Sarkars* had been staunchly resisting British domination ever since the beginning of the nineteenth century, and in the period 1801-1805 a whole series of British punitive expeditions was sent to the area. An uprising broke out once again in 1813-1814 and again in 1831. Several years were required for the suppression of the latter.

In 1807 the whole of the Delhi region took up arms. In 1814 at Tuppah of Muneer (near Varanasi) armed Rajput peasants secured an abolition of the sale by public auction of a large village community to a stranger. In 1817-1818 the peasants of Orissa, led by a local feudal lord, rose up in protest against the introduction of taxation of their rent free service lands. An uprising of the Ramusis, supported by warriors of the former Maratha armies, raged in the Poona district from 1826 to 1829. The authorities were obliged to cede to them holdings subject only to low revenue charges. In 1830-1831 British troops were sent to the Mysore state to suppress a peasant uprising in the Bednore district that tax increases had called forth. In 1835-1837 there was an uprising in Gumsur (Madras Presidency) in protest at the confiscation of an estate belonging to a local feudal lord (because of his arrears) and the institution of direct British rule. In 1842 an uprising flared up for a similar reason in Sagar. In 1846-1847 the peasants in Karnal rose up in revolt led by one of the local *palayakkars*. In 1848 the Rohillas in Nagpur took up arms. In 1844, in the Kolhapur and Santavadi states bordering on the Bombay Presidency there was a large-scale revolt in protest at the British decision increasing the land revenue to pay the prince's tribute. In the

Bombay Presidency itself the peasants from the Khandesh principality rose up in protest at the land-survey implemented there which resulted in an increased land tax.

Revolts of tribesmen were also taking place which forced the colonial authorities to wage exhausting and testing "minor wars". This was the case after the uprising of the Hos tribe in Chhota Nagpur (in the Bengal Presidency) in 1831-1832. In the Bombay Presidency a number of uprisings took place: that of the Bhils in 1818-1831, the Kolis in 1824, and also peasant revolts in Kittur in 1824 and 1829, and incessant unrest in Cutch between 1815 and 1832. The Kolis came out in revolt again in Shahyadri in 1839 and in 1844-1846. In other parts of the country there was a similar pattern of unrest: in 1820 there was an uprising of the Mers in Rajputan, in 1846 the Khonds rose up in Orissa and 1855 saw the Santal revolt in Bihar.

There was also unrest in India's towns usually resulting from the introduction of new taxes. This as a rule took the form of *hartal* (a type of general strike). There was one in Benares after a new house tax had been introduced, and one in Bareilly in 1816 after new police levies had been announced. The most resolute of these uprisings were those undertaken by peasants led by organisations, often fairly broad-based, which made careful preparations beforehand. Usually these organisations advocated some kind of sectarian teaching and appealed to their followers to join the struggle against the "infidels" (i.e. the British). In the Bombay Presidency in 1810, for example, insurgent Bohra Mahdists, led by a former military commander, Abdur Rahman, seized a fort near Surat after which Abdur Rahman proclaimed himself *Mahdi* (Messiah).

A more far-reaching and enduring movement was that of the Wahhabis—a sect that had been founded in India by Sayyid Ahmad Barelwi (1786-1831), a former commander of Holkar's. He advocated holy war against the "infidels" who had seized power in India. His appeal met with a response from the Moslem peasants of Bengal and Bihar, and also from artisans and small shopkeepers in the towns. The Wahhabis were not only preparing for the struggle against the British, but they were also calling for a restructuring of society in accordance with the principles of social justice they proclaimed but which were formulated in most vague terms. In 1820 the colonial administration drove out the Wahhabis from Bihar, and they then resettled in Sittana, in the territory of the Pushtun tribes. There the Wahhabis came into conflict with the Sikhs. In 1831 the Sikhs killed Sayyid Ahmad. However the Wahhabi sect continued the struggle in Bengal and Bihar. In 1831 between three and four thousand armed Wahhabis captured a small town in the Barasat district after which they started marching towards Calcutta. Only after a grim battle were they finally scattered by artillery fire.

An offshoot from the Wahhabis was the new sect led by Haji Shariat Allah known as the Faraizi movement, whose members sought vengeance against the hated landlords whether they be



Hindus, Moslems or British planters. The Faraizi movement in Bengal was essentially a peasant movement of a medieval type. Like the Wahhabis before them, the members of this movement sought to uphold pure Islam and implement the equality of all men before God, but at the same time they declared that all members of their sect were equal, that land belonged to God and no-one had the right to demand rent from the cultivators in their own interests. Meanwhile in Patna in 1852 the Wahhabis proclaimed a holy war against the British. They were enthusiastically received both by the peasants and the urban strata of the population, and in particular by the Sepoys in the Bengali army.

A mere list of all these outbreaks of anti-colonial unrest shows how deep anti-British feeling was. However, all that this movement could offer instead of British hegemony was only the ideal of an independent feudal India. This explains why in their protest against colonial oppression the leaders of the movement called for a return to the feudal patterns of the past.

#### THE EMERGENCE OF A MOVEMENT OF THE BOURGEOISIE

By this time another movement was growing up in India. Its leaders were people who realised that India was then a backward country and who were opposed to a number of traditional customs and practices. These were men educated in Europe who had come to criticise feudal customs from a rationalist, humanist standpoint. However, while campaigning for the reform of Hinduism they co-operated with the British, expecting from them, as enlightened men, help in spreading education among the people and in combating age-old prejudices. In Bengal the members of this new movement were mainly *zamindars* and Company officials, in Bombay wealthy Parsees, and in Madras merchants. They often criticised the actions of the colonial administration but they did not protest against colonial hegemony in India as such.

The first representative of the new movement was the prominent Bengali *zamindar* Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833). In 1815 he set up a society named Arya Sabha, and in 1828 another known as Brahma Samaj. This was the first social organisation in India of a modern type, patterned on European models with an elected leadership, etc., although it had features of religious association. Ram Mohan Roy endeavoured to rid Hinduism of its worst feudal practices and institutions, which he declared were "latter-day accretion". In about 1821 he also founded the first Indian weekly newspaper *Sambad-Kaumudi*, published in Bengali, and then in 1822 a newspaper

*Mirat-ul-Akhbar* published in Persian. Both these publications discussed questions of social life in India and Bengal.

To counter the influence of Brahma Samaj, Indian merchants, opposed to the activities of Ram Mohan Roy, set up another society, Dharma Samaj, in 1830. It was also at this time that the Student Academic Association at Hindu College (an academic institution of a modern type) was founded by Henry Derozio (son of a Portuguese father and a Hindu mother). This association was more resolute than other such societies in its opposition to traditional beliefs and superstitions. Out of this association there grew the organisation Young Bengal. When this organisation collapsed after harassment from the staff at Hindu College its one-time members joined Brahma Samaj. Since Ram Mohan Roy's death this society was led by Dwarka Nath Tagore (1794-1846), a leading Bengali merchant and founder of the first Indian trading company run on European lines. All manner of societies designed to promote enlightenment and other such goals were springing up one after another in Bengal during the 1830s and 1840s. Finally the British Indian Association was set up in Calcutta in 1851, a mature national political organisation.

Similar developments were to be found in Bombay. The leading lights in such movements in this part of the country were rich and well-respected Parsees who had been co-operating with the colonial administration and also the young, emergent Marathi intelligentsia grouped around the local educational institution run on European lines, namely Elphinstone College. Prominent figures in this latter group were Bal Shastri Jambhekar (1812-1846) who founded the first Anglo-Maratha weekly *Bombay Durpun* (Bombay Mirror) which exhorted the British to grant the Indians a share in the administration of their country and criticised the colonial tax and customs policies; Ramakrishna Vishwanath, who published a book on the history of India in Marathi, in which he criticised British policy in India, although he held that all could be put right given closer contacts between enlightened Englishmen and Indians; Gopal Hari Deshmukh who wrote for the Poona newspaper *Prabhakar* (Sun) under the pseudonym Lokahitavadi (champion of the people's interests). He analysed the reasons for India's loss of independence, which he put down to observance of old feudal practices and the gap separating the nobility and the Indian people. In his call for the spread of enlightenment Deshmukh predicted that it would take the Indians at least two hundred years to free themselves from British tutelage.

The Bombay association, set up in 1852 and resembling that in Bengal, had split: the moderate merchant elite withdrew from the association when the student youth came forth with the demand that all Indians should have equal rights with the British. It was only the Madras association that posed the question of restricting the exploitation of peasants by the Indian landlords. As the charter of the East India Company was being revised once again, all three



associations sent the Parliament in London petitions with complaints about the "injustices" of the colonial administration in India.

The emergent bourgeois-national movement was isolated from those strata of the peasants and the city poor who revolted and strove to oust the British from India. That is why, during the popular uprising of 1857-1859, the influential bourgeois circles held themselves aloof and did not take part in the uprising.

#### THE GREAT POPULAR UPRISING OF 1857-1859

Indignation at the British colonial yoke, which had made itself felt throughout the first half of the nineteenth century in scattered, strictly localised action of specific strata of the population, began to merge to a certain measure, when the leadership of the national movement was taken up by Sepoys, long since used to organised action. The British Sepoys were divided between three armies: those of the Bengal, Bombay and Madras presidencies, and it was the largest of these armies, the Bengal army, numbering 170,000 men (of whom 140,000 were Indians) that was the most socially homogeneous. The Sepoys of the Bengal army were recruited almost exclusively from Oudh, Bihar and the North-West provinces and they consisted of Brahmans, Rajputs, Jats and also Moslems (Sayyids and Pathans). The representatives of these groups constituted the upper strata of the village communities (*pattidars*) or they were sons of petty feudal lords—village *zamindars*. They all spoke Hindustani and kept in close contact with their home villages.

Since the Sepoys had not been engaged in warfare for a long time merely executing the role of a police force, they were stationed in various military cantonments scattered throughout Northern India particularly in the Doab. Although they received what by Indian standards were good salaries, discontent within their ranks was rife by this time: Indians were unable to obtain promotion beyond the rank of sergeant and any fresh recruit from Britain would automatically be placed above them. In the military cantonments the British had their own messes and lived in comfortable bungalows, while the Sepoys, together with their wives and children, were allotted primitive huts.

Wahhabi propaganda had been enthusiastically received by these Sepoys, particularly as the hundredth anniversary of the Battle of Plassey was approaching and the Sepoys were making ready to overthrow British rule on precisely that date. The idea of an uprising had taken root long since, but it was not a systematically organised one. In fact it broke out spontaneously. Nor is the spontaneity of the revolt refuted by the fact of unexplained passing of chapatis from one

village to another just before the uprising, an act which since feudal times had heralded alarm.

The immediate cause for the uprising was the introduction by the British of new cartridges for the Enfield rifles which were reputed to be smeared with beef fat and lard, contact with which was seen as unclean both to the Moslem and the Hindu faithful. However the British command took strict measures against those who refused to use the new cartridges. In Meerut on May 10, 1857, a group of sergeants and soldiers who had refused to use the cartridges were publicly demoted and sentenced to long periods of exile. This move sparked off the uprising of the Sepoys who enjoyed the support of the urban poor and the peasants in the nearby villages. After slaying their British officers, the Sepoys set off on May 11 to Delhi, where the Delhi garrison joined them. After capturing Delhi and seeking vengeance on the British officers there, the Sepoys made their way to the Red Fort and forced the aged Bahadur Shah II (1837-1857), pensioned off by the British and stripped of all power, to proclaim himself the ruler of India and sign an appeal dictated by the insurgents. The Moslem *Ulemas* issued a *fatawa* proclaiming a holy war against the British. In Delhi a government consisting of nobles from the court was set up. Bahadur Shah represented for the insurgent people a symbol of India's restored independence.

However Delhi was in a state of confusion, as detachments of Sepoys from various parts of the country flocked there. The Sepoys would only obey their own commanders and had no trust in the court government in Delhi. The city was short of food and resources, since the *zamindars* postponed the despatch of land-tax money to Delhi. Soon discipline in the Sepoy ranks reached a low ebb.

In these difficult conditions the Sepoys instituted their own administrative body known as the *jalsa* (council) consisting of six representatives of the Sepoys and four representatives of the townspeople. However this council was not in a position to take control of the difficult situation which reigned in Delhi. Karl Marx wrote at the time "...a motley crew of mutineering soldiers who have murdered their own officers, torn asunder the ties of discipline, and not succeeded in discovering a man upon whom to bestow the supreme command, are certainly the body least likely to organise a serious and protracted resistance".\*

The Sepoys used to firm discipline but little versed in the art of war or in commanding military units larger than a detachment, were only able to deal with tactical questions, not matters of strategy. After capturing a major stronghold like the Red Fort in Delhi, they went over to a defensive stand instead of taking the uprising to areas not yet

\* K. Marx and F. Engels, *The First Indian War of Independence 1857-1859*, p. 44.



involved. This enabled the British to recover their wits, muster what loyal forces they had and lay siege to Delhi.

To all intents and purposes the uprising had spread no further than the Doab and parts of Central India. In Bengal Governor-General Canning (1856-1862), after mobilising all Europeans in the area, including the British civilian population, succeeded in forestalling the Sepoys' next initiative: he disarmed them and suppressed isolated revolts in those units where they nevertheless took place. In the Punjab the British command also succeeded in warding off a general Sepoy uprising. Action undertaken by insurgent garrisons was of a scattered nature and only a few detachments managed to join up with the Sepoy army in Delhi. The Sikh population regarded the Sepoys of Hindustan as occupation forces and gave them no support.

On the other hand the peasants of Oudh and Bundelkhand immediately joined the uprising: they drove out the new landowners "from outside", raided local government buildings and stopped paying land rent even to their own long-established *zamindars* and *talukdars*. After driving out local representatives of the colonial administration, the peasants from the communities set up armed detachments for their own defence and defended the village community lands which had been expropriated by the British conquerors.

The Indian population from towns in the Doab played an active part in the uprising; after liberating a number of large cities such as Aligarh (May 21), Bareilly and Lucknow (May 31), Cawnpore (June 4), Allahabad (June 6), they set up a government in each of them. In Bareilly the new administration was headed by an aged military leader, Khan Bahadur Khan, a descendant of Hafiz Rahamat Khan Rohilla, who had fallen in a battle against the troops of Oudh and the Company in 1772; in Cawnpore the new administration was led by Nana Saheb, an adopted son of the deceased Peshwa Baji Rao II, who had been robbed of his realm by Dalhousie; while the man who took charge in Allahabad was a schoolteacher and follower of the Wahhabi sect, Mawlawi Liyaqat Ali, and the uprising in Patna was led by a Wahhabi book-dealer, Pir Ali.

Meanwhile the Sepoys defending Delhi made various sorties but did not undertake any serious offensive. Even Bakht Khan, the energetic leader of the detachment from Bareilly who was one of the most talented Sepoy commanders, could not restore order despite the most resolute measures undertaken to this end. As a result of all this inactivity on the part of the Sepoys the British proceeded to take the initiative and assemble large forces called up from Madras and Iran and units that had been on their way to China. The Sepoy army of almost sixty-five thousand men was unable to drive back from the ramparts of Delhi the British force of a mere six thousand. Military setbacks and a shortage of funds made some of the Sepoys leave Delhi on their own accord. The defeat of Bakht Khan's insurgent detachment by the British at Najafgarh was another bitter blow for

the Sepoys. Furthermore, in the proclamation of the insurgents issued in September 1857 many reforms were promised after the victory: all manner of privileges and advantages for the merchants, the Moslem religious leaders, etc., but nothing was said about reductions in land revenue. This was a disappointment to the Sepoys, mostly men from the villages. On September 14 the British, who by this time had assembled their forces, began to storm Delhi and five days later they captured the town and the fortress.

Then there began savage reprisals against the insurgents. Even the Governor of Bombay, Lord Elphinstone, wrote that the crimes committed by the British army after the capture of Delhi were indescribable. No-one was safe from their vengeance: neither friends nor foes. Their marauding exceeded even that of Nadir Shah.

By capturing Delhi the British were not only able to liberate seventeen thousand of their troops, but also undermined the morale of those who had taken part in the uprising, for Delhi had become a symbol of an independent Moghul India for the Sepoys. Bahadur Shah, who had been hiding in Humayun's tomb on the outskirts of Delhi, was taken prisoner, tried and exiled to Rangoon, where he died in 1862. His sons were killed by a British officer, Hodson, who had accompanied them as prisoners of war. Delhi after this terrible massacre remained devastated for several years.

Meanwhile General Neill, who had been on his way from Calcutta to support the British contingent at Delhi, ruthlessly massacred the Sepoys and the townspeople he found in the insurgent towns of Benares and Allahabad. His cruelty even aroused the displeasure of Lord Canning, who relieved him of his command which was given to General Havelock. He, in his turn, organised a veritable massacre, burning villages and leaving hundreds of hanged men in his path. One of the cities he passed through was Cawnpore, which had been a centre of the uprising alongside with Delhi and Lucknow.

The insurgents in that city were led by Nana Saheb, his bodyguard Tantia Topi and his secretary Azimullah Khan, who had received a good education and made two visits to Europe. The soldiers of the British garrison and their families had taken refuge behind the fortifications of the military cantonment, and thanks to their artillery were able to hold back the Sepoys besieging them. In three weeks the garrison had to surrender.

Meanwhile close on ten thousand insurgent Sepoys and peasants had gathered in the town, where there was a shortage of food and the problems that had beset the insurgents in Delhi repeated themselves. On two occasions the Sepoy troops joined battle with Havelock's army but both times they were defeated despite their brave fighting. When they broke into Cawnpore in the middle of June Havelock's troops wrought havoc among the townspeople. After that Havelock



twice attempted in vain to force his way into another centre of the uprising, Lucknow.

In that town events took the following course. After the uprising the power of the former dynasty was restored (that of the Nawabs of Oudh) and old grandees from the Oudh court of the past took the administration of the town into their hands. The true leader of the uprising there was Ahmad Ullah from a noble family of Madras. In his day he had travelled to Britain, but on returning he had joined the Wahhabis and become a wandering Wahhabi preacher.

The British garrison with wives and children entrenched themselves inside the Residency. The Sepoys besieged the Residency for a long time, shelling it all the time. However the British troops did not suffer heavy losses because the Sepoys were poor shots. Then the insurgents began to dig an underground passage. It was not until September 21 that Havelock got through to Lucknow. However his detachment was surrounded by Sepoys and itself besieged.

Meanwhile in Lucknow there had gathered not merely Sepoys and peasants who had taken up arms in various parts of the Doab, but also men and women fleeing from the British troops, who were plundering and burning everything in their path. Altogether there were more than fifty thousand people in the town. The general in command of the British army, Collin Campbell, broke through from Cawnpore to Lucknow on November 17, 1857, with four and a half thousand men and artillery. He was unable to capture Lucknow but when he left the town he did take with him the British, who had been under siege in the Residency. Meanwhile Tantia Topi, with a detachment of men from Gwalior (who had risen up against the British, in defiance of their prince who remained loyal), marched at great speed to Cawnpore and routed the British detachment left there by Windham. In the fighting that followed, Campbell was able to defeat Tantia Topi and capture Cawnpore once more. It was not till three months later, when he had mustered an army of forty-five thousand, that Campbell resolved to launch a final attack on Lucknow. The town was defended by all the people that had assembled in it by that stage—close on two hundred thousand. They fought bravely but were poorly armed and lacked efficient commanders. The battle for Lucknow continued for a month. On March 19, 1858, the town fell, but for about two weeks the British troops went on plundering and killing. The haul of booty was rather big.

After the fall of Lucknow, this last major centre of the Sepoys' resistance, they scattered in small detachments and started to wage what was really a guerrilla warfare consisting of small-scale skirmishes with British detachments. In March 1858 Governor-General Canning declared that the estates belonging to the *talukdars* of Oudh would be confiscated, although they had hitherto

remained neutral. The *talukdars* rose up to defend their possessions and joined Bahadur Khan in Bareilly. It was only in May 1858 that Campbell was able to capture Bareilly because of the strong resistance he met with there. After that some groups of Sepoys with Nana Saheb and the grandees of Oudh made for the border of Nepal, while other groups with Ahmad Ullah and certain other leaders returned to Oudh, where Ahmad Ullah was treacherously slain by a feudal lord.

In Bundelkhand Tantia Topi was still active and proved himself to be one of the most able Sepoy commanders. General Rose with his army turned to Bundelkhand from Bombay. The small principality of Jhansi with a fortress of the same name lay on his time. A young princess, Lakshmi Bai, was reigning there at the of her son. The people of Jhansi attempted to organise an uprising and a few of the British were killed. However Lakshmi Bai restrained her subjects from any extreme action. Yet the killing of the British provided sufficient pretext for Rose to attack the Jhansi principality. Lakshmi Bai at first tried to convince Rose that she had nothing to do with the killings. However when the British troops began, despite her efforts, to besiege Jhansi, Lakshmi Bai herself took command of the defence of the fortress.

After Jhansi had been taken by the British, Lakshmi Bai fled and joined Tantia Topi's detachment. They succeeded in taking Gwalior but Rose then sent his troops out against Tantia Topi and defeated him. Lakshmi Bai who had been in command of the cavalry during the battle was slain and Tantia Topi retreated with the remnants of his routed detachments. In order to avoid his pursuers he kept changing the route of his march. First he made his way to Khandesh, but later turned off to Gwalior again. Eventually he was betrayed, taken prisoner by the British and hanged on April 18, 1859.

On November 1, 1858, a Proclamation from Queen Victoria had been made public according to which the administration of India was made over to the British Crown and the East India Company was to be disbanded. The Queen promised an amnesty to all feudal lords who had joined the uprising, with the exception of those who had taken a direct part in any killing of the British, and she also announced that the new regime would respect the property rights of the Indian feudal lords.

The result of this Proclamation was that the feudal élite now dissociated itself from the uprising. The *talukdars*, *rajahs* and *zamindars* of Oudh who had risen up after the March announcement made by Canning now laid down arms. The only feudal lords who continued the struggle were those who had no hope of a pardon.

Eventually their resistance was broken. Nana Saheb and Azimullah perished in the jungle and Bahadur Khan was executed by the British. The uprising was suppressed.



This popular uprising of 1857-1859 was defeated for a number of reasons. Although its main fighting force had consisted of peasants and artisans, it had been led by the feudal nobility. These leaders however had shown themselves to be incapable of leading the national liberation struggle. They had not succeeded in evolving a united strategy or setting up a united command. On frequent occasions they began to pursue their own personal ends. The three centres of the uprising, which emerged spontaneously, acted independently of each other. Moreover the feudal lords did not take any steps to alleviate the lot of the peasants and thus alienated certain sections of the peasantry. When the British government made concessions to the feudal lords, the latter dissociated themselves from the uprising. The Sepoy commanders had not been able to wage such a complex war. They could solve tactical problems but had had no training in strategic thinking, in calculating the course of the whole campaign. Finally the insurgents did not come forward with clear goals. They had called for a return to the past, for a return to the independent India of the Moghul empire, although in the middle of the nineteenth century a return to feudal society was quite unreal.

Although they had suppressed the uprising the British were nevertheless obliged to modify their policy in India. The East India Company was liquidated and India became a colony of the British government, which now appointed all employees of the colonial administration. The British were also anxious not to arouse the discontent of the feudal lords and so they adopted a more cautious policy, making concessions to the more influential of the feudal lords. In general after the uprising a new stage in Britain's colonial policy in India began.

#### INDIAN CULTURE IN THE EIGHTEENTH AND EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURIES

Due to the collapse of the Moghul empire, widespread economic chaos and India's gradual loss of her independence a general cultural decline is characteristic of the period under discussion. Yet at the same time in some spheres of culture achievements were made and memorable works of art were created. For the most part, however, we find an elaboration of those art forms which had already been evolved during the medieval period. In literature, for example, attention had been turned as before to poetry, architecture abounded with copies of earlier building styles and painting was confined to miniatures. In the first half of the nineteenth century new phenomena emerged which to some extent were taken over from the British. This was particularly true with regard to literature: prose works started to appear in a number of Indian

languages, collections of letters on contemporary themes, and journalism, hitherto completely unknown in India. Yet these writings were not straight imitations of British models. Insofar as they treated subjects taken from contemporary life, this meant that a whole new vocabulary was developed conforming to the new style.

As for architecture the Indians were still putting up buildings like those of the Moghul period, but in some cases technical solutions were improved upon. However, buildings of a completely new type were appearing, those put up by the British. Some of these buildings were later to influence the evolution of a special, so-called Anglo-Indian style of architecture, particularly in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

#### History

In the eighteenth century the writing of chronicles in the old style was still carried on. A valuable example of these eighteenth century chronicles was *Siyar ul-Matakerin* (Biography of the Last Rulers) which covered the period up to 1780 and was written by Ghulam Hussain Khan Tabatabai, a prominent grandee who had lived at the courts of the Great Moghul in Delhi and the nawabs of Bengal, and who after the rout of Mir Kasim had entered the service of the Company. Similar chronicles were written by Mir Hussain Ali Khan Kermani at the courts of Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan.

An extremely valuable historical work is the history of Gujarat, *Mirati Ahmadi* (The Mirror of Ahmad), written by Ali Muhammad Khan, *diwan* (i.e. head of the Revenue Department) in Gujarat during the forties and fifties of the eighteenth century. The author not only made reference to many firmans and other documents, but also, in the appendix to his work, provided an encyclopedic description of Gujarat in the eighteenth century—its buildings, trades, historic sights, short biographies of famous personalities, etc. Another wide-ranging biographical work, *Ma'asir-ul-umara* (Deeds of the Amirs), reveals an impressive knowledge of source materials. Shah Nawaz Khan, author of this enormous work, served first Asaf Jah and later Nasir Jang, and then in 1758 he was killed by the French whom he had opposed. His work contains accounts of the lives of seven hundred nobles in Moghul India in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It provides a most valuable historical source and contains a vast amount of important information. In short the finest traditions of historical scholarship under the Moghuls were fostered in the eighteenth century. In the nineteenth century the writing of chronicles as such virtually disappeared, since there were in fact no more influential patrons to be found who were in a position to finance the compilation of such works.



### Astronomy

In the technical sciences the only advance was made in astronomy. This applies in particular to the work of Jaipur Jai Singh (?-1743). He acquainted himself with the discoveries of the ancient Greeks, Arabs and Portuguese and built extensive observatories in Jaipur (out of marble), in Delhi (in red sandstone), in Mathura, Ujjain and Varanasi.

### Literature. A General Survey

In the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth century the various literary languages of India became more developed, although the themes and subjects treated remained those of the traditional variety. At the beginning of the nineteenth century journalism appeared on the horizon. Since the literature of India is a multi-lingual one, this section will deal separately with the literatures of the main languages.

### Urdu Literature

Poetry in Urdu was of the strictly traditional type being written for the most part by court poets. The poet Sauda (Mirza Muhammad Rafi), 1713-1781, wrote first at the court of the Great Moghul and later, after Delhi had been destroyed by Nadir Shah, he fled to Lucknow taking refuge at the court of the Nawab of Oudh. Sauda was a satirist, but while sharply criticising his opponents, he in fact provided a picture of the collapse of Indian feudal society, demonstrating how traditional moral principles were being violated, how corruption was growing, along with fierce competition for advantageous positions at court, etc. His contemporary, Mir Taqi Mir (1725-1810), was a lyric poet and in his *ghazals* permeated with sincere emotion wrote of his ill-starred love for a woman given away in marriage for reasons of prestige and advantage; he also protested against all forms of tyranny and violence, which were so manifest in the Delhi of his times.

Unlike other Urdu poets of his day Nazir Akbarabadi (1740-1830) refused to live at any court and remained a teacher at Agra. He was in contact with various strata of the people, took part in religious festivals of the Moslems, Hindus and Sikhs and wrote in a vivid, somewhat down-to-earth, popular language about the life of the ordinary people.

Mirza Ghalib (1796-1869) is considered the greatest writer in Urdu at that time. In his *ghazals* he described his feelings and complex meditations and tried to surmount certain deficiencies of the language by introducing new words and expressions some of

which became part of the Urdu language and enriched it. Through the publication of his letters Mirza Ghalib became the father of Urdu prose-writing and was the first to introduce colloquial speech into literature. Desolate at the fact of the decline of Moghul society Mirza Ghalib did not take part in the popular uprising of 1857-1859, although he was living at the court of the Great Moghul.

Another important stimulus for the development of Urdu prose came from Calcutta where the British opened Fort William College to provide tuition for colonial officials in the local languages and Indian scholars were called upon to compile specially designed texts for the teaching of Urdu. Since there was no material available, they wrote modern versions of various medieval *dastans* (short stories), which provided a useful foundation for the development of literary Urdu prose. About fifty books in Urdu were published at the college printing works, the most popular of which was the collection of stories entitled *Bagh-o-Bahar* (Garden and Spring) by Mir Aman, a former *jagirdar* from Delhi, who had settled in Calcutta after the invasion by Ahmad Shah Durrani.

### Marathi Literature

A large number of heroic songs or *pavadas* were written in Marathi in the eighteenth century; these were renderings of events in Maharashtra history since the times of Shivaji. The most remarkable poets of that period were Ramjoshi (1758-1812) and Anand Phando (1744-1819). A new development of that period was the emergence of Marathi prose, in particular that of the publicists. A great deal for the development of the Marathi literary language was accomplished by Bal Shastri Jambhekar, who wrote on social issues in Marathi in the Anglo-Maratha journal *Bombay Durpun* he had founded in 1832, by Ramkrishna Vishwanath who published a book entitled *Indian Scene, Past and Present* in 1843, and Lokhitawadi, who in 1848-1850 published in the journal *Prabhakar* (Sun), founded in 1840, a series of articles which later appeared as a separate volume entitled *Satpatra* (A Hundred Letters). In all these works the writers were treating subjects, which hitherto had not been touched upon in Maratha literature, and they introduced new concepts and turns of phrase. As a result, the Marathi language was, evidently, the most developed literary language in India then. In the early decades of the nineteenth century far-reaching studies were made of the grammatical and lexical structure of the Marathi literary language. One of the most well-known Maratha philologists at that time was Dadoba Pandurang (1814-1882).



### Bengali Literature

In the eighteenth century a further elaboration of medieval poetic genres took place. Although the subjects and forms of literature remained traditional, the language itself was developing and the descriptive means of the poets were becoming more sophisticated—similes were more vivid and no longer so tradition-bound, and characters more realistic. The leading poets of this period Ramprasad Sen (1718-1775) and Bharat Chandra Roy (1712-1760) wrote at the court of one of the Bengal feudal lords, the ruler of Nadia. The beauty and subtlety of form found in Bharat Chandra Roy's poem, *Vidya Sundara*, about two lovers, attracted the attention of the first Russian Indologist, Gerasim Lebedev (1749-1817), who translated it into Russian and also put some of Bharat Chandra Roy's verse to music and incorporated it into a theatrical performance in Calcutta in 1795.

Ram Mohan Roy was the first Bengali writer of the new school who contributed considerably to the development of Bengali prose. He founded the journal *Sambad Kaumudi* and wrote many articles on a variety of social themes. He also combated the prejudices and outdated rituals of Hinduism. Ram Mohan Roy laid the foundations for the flowering of Bengali prose which was to follow in the second half of the nineteenth century.

### Tamil Literature

The most developed literature of South India was Tamil literature. It continued the medieval tradition of commentary on Sanskrit writings. However in the eighteenth century writers no longer endeavoured to interpret the texts, to which they wrote commentaries, by their own thoughts and renderings as had been the practice previously, but rather to reproduce with the help of this text India's historical past, sometimes in a highly idealised form. For the Tamils recollection of the glorious centuries of ancient India provided a means of asserting their national identity.

In the first quarter of the eighteenth century the Italian missionary, Constanzio Beschi (1680-1746), made an important contribution to the development of Tamil prose. Writing under the name of Viram Muni, he composed a number of works on Christian subjects but won particular popularity with his collection of fairy-tales *Adventures of a Simple Guru* in colloquial Tamil.

The Tamil poet, Tayumanavar, writing during the first half of the eighteenth century, was a follower of the *bhakti* cult, although he depicted Shiva as an abstract divinity relevant to all peoples and religions. Like other *bhakts*, Tayumanavar thus attempted to convey the idea of equality among men. In the first half of the nineteenth century these ideas were also developed in the poems of

Sundaram Pillai and later Ramalinga Swami (1823-1874) whose language bordered on the colloquial. Ramalinga Swami also wrote stories that were to make an important contribution to the development of Tamil prose. Arumuga Navelar (1822-1874) is held to be the leading prose writer of this period, but Tamil novels only appeared in the second half of the nineteenth century.

### Theatre

In the eighteenth century when dramatic art entered a period of decline, plays came to be written not so much for stage performances as for reading aloud. Popular shows based on themes taken from the ancient Indian epics were performed at fairs, but these were merely re-renderings of traditional themes. In 1757 the Company set up a theatre in Calcutta for the British residents. The local Indians did not attend performances there, for the plays were on subjects alien to them and only very few Indians knew English well enough then to be able to follow what was happening on stage.

An important landmark in the life of Calcutta was the opening of a modern theatre for Indians in 1795. Its founder was the musician (and later Indologist) Gerasim Lebedev. He spent twelve years in India, studying Sanskrit, Bengali and Hindustani; he transposed two English plays into colloquial Bengali, shifting the scene of action to India and making the heroes Bengalis. The owners of the Company theatre were able by means of various intrigues to make sure that their rival went bankrupt and his theatre was closed down. Lebedev had to leave India and it was not until 1831 that the Bengali, P. Thakur, founded the Hindu Theatre, where plays however were put on in English. In the forties of the nineteenth century there already existed several such theatres in Calcutta, where performances were also put on in Bengali.

### Architecture

Taken all in all architecture went through a decline in the eighteenth century; the splendid harmony of proportions that had distinguished the buildings of the Moghul empire's heyday was a thing of the past. The style of the eighteenth century is characterised by excessive ornament, a profusion of detail of no relevance to structure, that served rather to distract the eye from overall patterns and lead to fragmentation. At the same time new architectural methods and techniques were appearing.

In the eighteenth century there appeared a number of new towns complete with palaces, streets, bridges, etc. An example of these was the city of Jaipur, which Rajah Jai Singh had begun to build.



The city palace was a whole ensemble of buildings, the most famous of which was the Hava Mahal (Palace of Winds). This was a large building with numerous niches and oriels which made it cool and created currents of air that whistled softly through the building. Inside, the palace was decorated with multi-coloured encrusted marble and stone trellis-work. Between the palaces and the fortress there were parks laid out in the English style which harmonised well with the mountainous landscape beyond the city walls. Another such city was Lashkar, the new capital of the Gwalior state, that was founded in 1812. The houses there incorporated traditional elements such as verandahs extending from the front of the building, balconies complete with intricate arches on small delicate pillars, attractive open *jharuhas* balconies decorated with intricate stone carving. A fine bridge was another of Lashkar's attractions.

In North India Lucknow, the capital of the Nawabs of Oudh, was built in the eighteenth century, involving a whole complex of buildings—palaces, mosques, tombs for Oudh's rulers and nobles, the prayer halls of the Greater and Lesser Imambara, etc. (The Imambara is the building where *muhammad*, the most sacred of all Moslem festivals, is enacted, the building in which is kept a wooden replica of Imam Husain's tomb decorated with jewels. He was slain at Kerbela in the year 680 and is revered by the Shiites. During the processions the tomb is carried through the streets and the story of the slaying of Imam Husain in battle is presented.) All these buildings were made of grey sandstone or flat slabs faced with *chunam* plaster (made of crushed shells and shiny). They were richly decorated with reliefs and fanciful detail consisting of bundles of sticks with globes at the end or spires with orbs of varying sizes supported on ribbed domes. These buildings stand out on account of their original and bold design, as for example the enormous rectangular hall of the Greater Imambara (almost 800 square metres) topped with a flat roof without a single pillar or support and with splendid acoustics, so that words whispered at one end of the hall are perfectly audible at the other.

Many of the temples, palaces and monasteries on the steep bank of the Ganges at Varanasi, and likewise the *ghats* were built in the eighteenth century.

Certain buildings of the early nineteenth century are also worthy of note. These include the white marble Jaina temple, Dharmanath (1844-1848) in Ahmadabad; also a large four-storey house richly decorated with carving and sculpture, and with a roof rimmed by a parapet that was built by a rich merchant in Bikaner. One of the architectural masterpieces of the eighteenth century is the Sikhs' Golden Temple at Amritsar decorated with elegant pavilions and bearing a copper dome covered with gold foil. It was built in 1764 or 1766. The Safdar Jang Mosque in Delhi (1753) is a replica of the buildings erected during the heyday of the Moghul empire, but it was built from less costly materials.

In the eighteenth century buildings of a European type start to appear in India, particularly in Bengal (although a certain number of sixteenth-century Portuguese churches, Dutch warehouses and dwelling houses dating from the seventeenth century can still be seen in South India). British houses built in the eighteenth century were mainly in the classical style, usually complete with pillars and did not harmonise at all with the surrounding landscape. The ultimate in ugly European buildings of that period is the army school, La Martinière College, in Lucknow. It was built on the bank of an artificial lake by a French adventurer Claude Martin, who commanded the artillery in the armies of the early nawabs of Oudh and who accumulated untold wealth while in India. With its blank walls, square and round towers, high turret on the third floor topped with a through crown, this edifice is reminiscent of a European fortified castle in a hotchpotch of incompatible styles. Statues in the European classical style top the towers at various levels and over the porch there are two enormous, two-dimensional stone lions through whose bared teeth one can glimpse the sky beyond. Fortunately such buildings did not in any way influence Indian styles of architecture.

### Painting

In the eighteenth century Moghul miniatures became ever more widespread. They echoed older models but had brighter sometimes almost glaring colours. Many miniatures were used to decorate craft articles such as caskets, trays, medallions of ivory, etc. After the middle of the eighteenth century the Moghul school of miniature-painting virtually disappears, however the second half of the century marked the heyday of schools of painting in the small mountain principalities of Jammu, Chamba, Mandi, Kangra and Tehri-Garhwal (which explains why these miniatures were known as *pahari*—from the mountains).

The most significant of these was the Kangra school. Unlike the miniatures of the Moghul school, which depicted the life of the Moghul grandees or were used to illustrate works by poets writing in Persian, the miniatures of the Kangra school depicted mainly subjects taken from the Hindu epics, and in particular subjects associated with the cult of Krishna: Krishna in his childhood, Krishna among the shepherdesses, playing the flute, his beloved Radha in the midst of her female companions, the meetings of Krishna and Radha, etc. Krishna was always depicted in an unusual shade of pale blue in these miniatures. An echo of the Rajput school of painting is provided in the two-dimensional representation of the figures usually seen in profile with somewhat enlarged eyes. Perspective is mostly absent, and the crowd is depicted in such a way that the figures are drawn in a series of rows as it were, with those at the back placed higher than those in front. Trees are stylised; the scenes chosen are mostly at night, when



the sky is studded with stars, yet the colours used are bright ones, although of a narrow range—blues of different depths or golden-brown hues, etc. It should also be noted that the Kangra miniatures depict not the court milieu but peasants, shepherds, craftsmen, and so on.

At the end of the eighteenth century paler colours come to be used; there is a marked deterioration in composition skills and even the gods are depicted as simple mortals in realistic day-to-day settings, often within the family circle. In the first half of the nineteenth century painting becomes more like a craft than an art. Frequent representations of British officials appear and also all manner of solemn processions. Miniatures are no longer merely a means of book illustration, they provide decoration for everyday articles.

## INDIA AT THE ONSET OF IMPERIALISM (1860-1897)

### CHANGES IN THE SYSTEM OF COLONIAL ADMINISTRATION

The popular uprising of 1857-1859 is an important landmark in the history of India. It brought to light the relative weakness of the social basis of British rule and brought out the deep hatred of the masses for their oppressors. Jawaharlal Nehru remarked in his book *The Discovery of India*: "Though the revolt had directly affected only certain parts of the country it had shaken up the whole of India and, particularly, the British administration." A

### Administrative Reforms in the 1860s

The British bourgeoisie found itself obliged to introduce substantial changes in the system of colonial administration in order to consolidate the administrative apparatus and adapt it to suit the new historical conditions. In the course of these administrative reforms the final version of the state apparatus emerged in the main, i.e. the basic means of Britain's colonial enslavement of India.

As Marx pointed out, the East India Company "was broken before the war [was] at the end",\* for it had discredited itself not only in India but in Britain as well, and had long since been a historical anachronism.

On August 2, 1858, the British Parliament passed an Act for the Better Government of India under which state power in India was transferred to the British Crown and the colonial administration placed under the direct control of the British Parliament and government. The system of dual government was done away with, namely government through the Board of Control and the Court of Directors of the East India Company. These bodies were dissolved and their functions transferred to the newly created Ministry for Indian Affairs, under whose supervisor (the Secretary of State) a consultative council was set up, namely the Council of India that consisted of major officials from the British and Indian civil service.

\* Karl Marx, *Notes on Indian History*, p. 186.



The British Governor-General was lent the title of Viceroy and thus became the direct representative of the British Crown in the country. By centralising the administration the British bourgeoisie strengthened its control over the activities of the colonial administration. The property of the East India Company was made over to the British state, but its shareholders were paid compensation amounting to a total of three million pounds that was deducted from the Indian budget (i.e. at the expense of Indian taxpayers).

The active participation by Sepoy detachments in the uprising of 1857-1859 promoted the introduction of the military reform of 1861-1864. The colonial army was reorganised in such a way that the British units and sub-units came to play a much greater role (prior to the reform the ratio of British to Sepoy troops had been 1:6, but afterwards it dropped to 1:2 and later became 1:3). When units were replenished and deployed this was done in such a way as to mix ethnic, religious and caste groups. The bulk of the Sepoys were now recruited from among Punjabi Sikhs and the mountain peoples from the foothills of the Himalayas and Nepal, i.e. from among ethnic groups which had little contact with the population of the country's main areas. The Sepoys were armed with smooth-bore rifles, while the British soldiers were equipped with threaded rifles. This retention of the British units' superiority to the Sepoy ones with regard to military technology was also promoted by the fact that only British soldiers served in the artillery.

In the course of the military reform a new procedure was established for the appointment of junior officers so that representatives of the Indian feudal nobility might climb the military ladder.

This military reform like other changes in the colonial administration of the country, were designed to achieve two things: to centralise and to consolidate the British state apparatus in India on the one hand, and to create a firm base of support within Indian society for the colonial regime, i.e. to secure the support of the feudal landlord class, on the other.

Such was the essence of the administrative reform implemented at that period. In accordance with the Indian Councils Act (1861) legislative councils with consultative functions were set up under the Viceroy, the Governors of the three Presidencies and the lieutenant-governors of the North-West Provinces and the Punjab. It was stipulated that no less than half the members of the councils should be chosen from men who were not employed in the civil service. The aim of this reform was made quite clear in a speech by the Secretary of State for India, Sir Charles Wood, delivered in the House of Commons in 1861. He explained the need to involve Indian feudal lords in the work of the legislative councils, saying he was convinced that this was the best way to ensure that natives of high rank became well disposed to British rule.

The legislative councils did not weaken in the least the authoritarian nature of the rule of the Viceroy and of the provincial governors. It is

noteworthy that in the Indian Councils Act of 1861 special mention was made of the fact that major policy issues such as finances, taxation, the armed forces, relations between Indian states as well as foreign relations were not subject to discussion in the councils. The Viceroy was to be aided by an executive council consisting of the heads of various departments of the colonial administration. He exercised the right of veto as to the decisions of the central and provincial legislative councils.

The legal reform implemented at this time was also aimed at promoting the centralisation of the state apparatus and the influence wielded within it by British colonial officials. As a result the Supreme Court and the Company courts (*Sadar Diwani* and *Nizamat Adalats*) were abolished and in 1861 High Courts were set up in each of the three Presidencies, and then in 1866 in the North-West Provinces.

In the second half of the nineteenth century the state apparatus of colonial India had more or less assumed definitive shape. Its essential characteristic was that it served first and foremost the interests of the British exploiting classes. This is why its upper tiers (Parliament, that passed laws for India, and the government, which controlled the activities of the colonial administration through a special ministry) were located in Britain.

#### **The Alliance with the Princes and Feudal Landlords**

The new policy adopted in relation to the Indian feudal elite, announced as early as Queen Victoria's proclamation of November 1, 1858, was implemented with thoroughness and consistency by the colonial administration.

The British made generous gifts to the feudal élite as reward for its active support during the uprising. Honorary titles of Rajah and Nawab were conferred on many feudal lords from the North-West Provinces in the period 1867-1870; large sums of money were made over to them together with land grants and pensions. Some princes such as the rulers of Patiala, Jind, Rampur and Gwalior were granted extensive territories consisting of land confiscated from those who had taken part in the uprising.

Granting lands to the feudal landlords and princes, the British sought to consolidate by economic means their alliance with the élite of Indian society, an alliance rooted in the feudal lords' betrayal of the national interests of the peoples of India. This line of action reflected one of the fundamental principles of British policy in India: divide and rule. The colonialists altered the borders of the principalities, so as to create conditions in which it would be easy to stir up religious tensions among the masses.

Ruling princes of Rajputana and certain other parts of India were invited to a large reception (or *darbar*) in Agra in November 1859 to



meet the Governor-General and first Viceroy of India, Lord Canning (1856-1862) and to hear the first announcement of changes in British policy with regard to "lapsed principalities", i.e. where there was no direct heir by male line. Canning allowed Sindhia, the ruler of the state of Gwalior, to choose an adopted heir. The following year the right to choose an adopted heir was granted to all feudal lords with titles higher than that of *jagirdar* on condition that they served the British government loyally. Some states which had formerly been confiscated by the British were returned to adopted sons of their former rulers: Tehri-Garhwal in 1859, Kolhapur in 1861 and Dhar in 1864. The introduction of these measures by the colonial authorities who had now rejected the Dalhousie doctrine of "lapsed principalities", provided the practical implementation of the promise given in the proclamation of Queen Victoria to preserve immune and intact the possessions of the princes.

Yet, the bulk of the territory that had made up the former states annexed by Dalhousie nevertheless remained part of British India including Berar, the most fertile part of the Hyderabad state, which had been annexed to British territories under the term of a "perpetual lease".

The lavish spending by the princes and the nobles at their courts and also the tribute money which they had to pay to the colonialists often led to financial deficit in the states and their rulers' large debts to influential merchant houses and big *shroffs* (money-lenders). In the years immediately preceding the uprising of 1857-1859 the colonial administration often made use of this indebtedness to annex various states to British possessions. Now, in view of the new course for internal policy that was being followed, the states whose financial affairs were in a mess were to be under the supervisory control by British officials on a temporary basis.

While they followed a "carrot" policy in relation to the dependent princes, the British at the same time maintained complete control over them with regard to military affairs. The Russian scholar and Indologist I. P. Minayev while travelling through Central India in 1880 commented in his *Diary* to the effect that in the states the British resident was everything.

The princes retained the right to maintain detachments of fighting men. These troops were destined first and foremost for the suppression of anti-feudal and anti-colonial action in the states. The princes' troops who were badly trained and badly armed did not represent a serious threat to the colonialists, all the more so since the princes showed themselves to be loyal servants of the British. However in the states units and even formations of the Anglo-Indian army were maintained in order to add weight to the power of various types of British "residents" and "political agents". British garrisons were stationed at important strategic points and kept watch over essential communications.

The firmer control which the British colonial administration now

exerted over the states was formulated in writing on January 1, 1877, when at a special reception for the ruling princes of India given by the Viceroy Queen Victoria was proclaimed Empress of India. This meant that the states had now become parts of the British Empire and their rulers owed personal allegiance to the Crown, not merely in practice but from the legal point of view as well.

When the British were setting up their colonial empire they not only divided the country into "British India" and several hundred "native states", but placed each of the states on a special contractual footing first with the East India Company and later the British Crown. The differences in the amounts of tribute to be paid, in the degree of military and political control exerted by the Anglo-Indian authorities over the various states served to exacerbate tension between the princes. The retention of the system whereby small states remained dependent vassals of more powerful ones gave rise to endless misunderstandings and quarrels between the rulers of states. The colonial authorities, who usually acted as arbitrators in such disputes and conflicts, used their role as mediators to consolidate British influence in the states.

Manifestations of opposition from separate princes were, as a rule, for show and used to bring pressure to bear on the colonial authorities in disputes over individual issues. When Central Asia was being incorporated into Russia and Anglo-Russian relations deteriorated sharply, some of the princes attempted to establish contact with the Russian administration in Tashkent (for example the rulers of Kashmir in 1865 and 1870, of Indore in 1867, Gwalior in 1879 and Jaipur in 1880). However these attempts proved unsuccessful mainly because of the cautious stand adopted by the tsarist government, which pursued a policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of the British colonies.

The princes who were opposed to British rule were either removed by the colonial authorities under various pretexts (the ruler of Baroda in 1875, and that of Kashmir in 1889) or were "pacified" by one kind of concession or another. In 1886 the strategically important and historic Gwalior fortress was restored to the ruler of Gwalior, and in Mysore the local maharajah was restored to power (after that principality had been administered by British officials for nearly half a century).

However isolated differences and conflicts did not bring any really significant influence to bear on relations between the princes and the colonial authorities. The policy of the British colonialists vis-à-vis the vassal princes and the powerful feudal landowners in the second half of the nineteenth century was aimed at expanding and consolidating their alliance with the latter. Colonial policy with regard to agrarian relations and taxation was also directed to this end.



## INDIA'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT BETWEEN THE 1860s AND THE 1890s

From the 1860s onwards certain factors reflecting Britain's transition to the last stage of capitalism, namely imperialism, began to make themselves felt more and more in the country's economic and political life. These changes in the economy at the centre of the empire led to the emergence of new forms and methods for the colonial subjugation and plunder of India. The large-scale land-survey and land settlement operations in the second half of the nineteenth century served the task of consolidating the power of the British colonialists and intensifying the exploitation of India in the new historical conditions.

### British Agrarian Policy. Colonial and Feudal Land Monopoly

By the end of the 1870s in the course of the new land survey and the land revenue settlement in the *rayatwari* and temporary *zamindari* areas, the proprietary rights of various groups of feudal landlords were finally settled on the basis of private landownership. It was also in this period that the reform of the land-revenue systems was finally completed, although work had begun on it during the first half of the century.

The colonial authorities devoted particular attention to rights of landownership in areas that had been gripped by the uprising: 23,157 villages from a total of 23,522 confiscated by the administration during the uprising were restored to the *talukdars* of Oudh. Their rights as landowners were formulated in special laws issued in 1869 and 1870.

Consolidating the feudal-landlord ownership of land, the colonial authorities were nevertheless obliged to take into account the interests of the upper strata of the village communities who had taken an active part in the uprising. When the land-revenue reform was being carried out, the leaders of the communities and also the *inamdars* in the North-Western Provinces and Oudh were granted the status of feudal subpropriators-intermediaries between the tenant-farmers and the landlords (the *zamindars* and the *talukdars*).

While retaining to some extent the fragmentation of the property rights between various groups of feudal landlords, the British were aiming to extend and strengthen the social basis of the colonial regime.

The agrarian policy pursued by the colonial authorities was rife internally with contradictions. On the one hand, the land-revenue reforms introduced since the end of the eighteenth century had promoted the final crystallisation of private feudal and small-scale

peasant proprietorship (the latter in the *rayatwari* areas), destroying communal patterns of landownership and land use. Yet on the other, the retention within the system of land-tax collection of survivals of state landownership and the legal restrictions placed on operational use of land (it was clearly to this end that the tenancy legislation in the 1850s-1880s was directed, for example) kept India's agrarian structure at a stage preceding the final stage of disintegration of feudal property.

By consolidating feudal landownership of the *zamindari* type, the colonial authorities found themselves obliged to take into account the interests of the upper stratum of the former rural communities in the Punjab. This meant that the upper echelons of Punjabi feudal landowners (for example the *talukdars* and *ala-maliks*) became pensioners maintained by the treasury. When the property rights of feudal landowners enjoying tax privileges were settled, their holdings were even curtailed (this applied to the *jagirdars* and *inamdars*).

The *jagirdars* in certain provinces became landowners of a statutory type who, like the *inamdars*, paid their land taxes at a reduced rate (for example in Bombay and Berar). In Sind the ownership rights of the *jagirdars*, who previously had been holders of conditional grants, were now established by the British in respect of the lands the former had retained. However the majority of *jagirdars* and also some other groups of feudal lords were gradually excluded from participation in the collection of land revenues. Moreover while the committees investigating *inams* and *jagirs* were conducting their work some of the *inamdars* and *jagirdars* were deprived of their land and money grants. This applied to those regions where the colonial regime had suffered least during the uprising of 1857-1859 and where as a result the colonialists felt their position to be more secure (the Punjab, Sind, Western and South India). The number of *inams* and *jagirs* in the Bombay Presidency was especially cut down. The curtailment of the land holdings belonging to the *inamdars* and *jagirdars* was one of the causes for discontent and opposition among part of the Marathi petty and middle landowners and the intelligentsia from their ranks during the last thirty years of the nineteenth century.

British colonialists did not merely confine themselves to preserving the large estates of the landlords. In 1860 in most of the territories of the Central Provinces the right to own land was granted not only to representatives of the old feudal nobility such as the *zamindars* and *talukdars*, but also to persons responsible to the state for the paying in of the land revenue, the so-called *malguzars*. Prior to the British conquest the majority of them were heads of rural communities or tax-farmers. This meant that in these parts of India the British colonialists were encouraging the promotion of a new stratum of the landowning class from among those who in the feudal period had not even nominally been entitled to possess the bulk of the lands that now belonged to them. In the second half of the nineteenth century this colonial-feudal monopoly of land took definitive shape.



### Intensification of the Exploitation of India as a Source of Raw Materials and a Commodity Market. The Growth of Commodity-Money Relations

British agrarian policy was conditioned not only by the need to economically consolidate the position of India's class of feudal landowners, the stronghold of the colonialists, but also by the changes that were taking place within the system of colonial exploitation in India. The exploitation of India as a source of raw materials and a commodity market as early as the 1850s and the 1860s constituted the main form of colonial plunder. Intensification of the exploitation of the country as an agrarian and raw material appendage of capitalist Britain called for the creation of conditions more favourable to the growth of agricultural output and in particular to the raising of its marketability. This in its turn presupposed the consolidation of private rights of landownership.

In the second half of the nineteenth century the conversion of India into just such an appendage of Britain was in the main completed. As a result of the gradual decline of Britain's role as the "workshop of the world" and also the intensification of German and French expansion in Africa, South-East Asia and Oceania, which confined Britain's position as leading colonial power, India's importance for the development of the British economy was enhanced. This process was accelerated by the cotton boom of the 1860s, when British capitalists drastically increased their raw material exports from India, in particular cotton exports. The Civil War in the United States (1862-1865) reduced the export of American cotton to the European market, and this immediately increased the demand for Indian cotton. Its share in Britain's cotton imports tripled in the period 1860-1868. India was becoming Britain's main cotton supplier.

The growth of cotton production in India was triggered off by export demands. In the 1860s Central and Western India (Bombay, Sind, Rajputana, the principalities of Central India, Berar, the Central Provinces and Hyderabad) were transformed into regions specialising in the production of cotton for export.

The end of the Civil War in the United States meant the end of the cotton boom and a fall in prices for Indian cotton, yet the growth in cotton production in the country continued. In the last three decades of the century new bases for cotton production grew up in the Punjab and Sind, particularly in the irrigated lands. Growth in trade between India and Britain reflected the continuing division of labour between the British processing industry and Indian agriculture, between the British towns and the Indian villages.

Beginning with the 1860s the British bourgeoisie began bringing more agricultural produce from India, the main items being cotton, wool, jute, coconut fibre, rice, wheat, oil-seeds, spices, indigo and opium. The bulk of all India's exports (eighty per cent of the cotton

for example) went to Britain. India was becoming Britain's main food supplier. The total value of the commodities brought annually from India tripled between 1860 and the end of the century.

The exploitation of India as a commodity market had also increased. During the period in question India's imports from Britain increased fivefold. The bulk of these imports were fabrics, metal utensils and also other types of consumer goods.

The colonial character of India's foreign trade turnover can be seen from the following figures: in 1879 manufactured articles constituted only eight per cent of all Indian exports, but 65 per cent of her imports. Meanwhile within the system of colonial exploitation of India the crippling taxes that bled dry the working people of the country, in particular the peasants, continued to play a significant part.

In the middle of the sixties new taxes for the rural population were introduced, the rates of land taxation began to be increased. Meanwhile it was acknowledged by the colonial officials themselves that land taxes were collected regularly from land holders in bad years just as in good ones.

The revenues of the British colonial state, the main sources of which were direct and indirect taxation, increased from 361 million rupees in 1859 to 851 million rupees in 1890. The growth of the tax burden reflects how the country was being turned into an agrarian and raw material appendage. Taxes forced the Indian peasants to sell at the markets a considerable part of their produce. This gave rise to conditions making it much easier for the British to pump agricultural raw materials out of the country.

In a description of the world grain trade at that time Marx pointed out that in Russia and India the peasants "had to sell a portion of their produce, and a constantly increasing one at that, for the purpose of obtaining money for taxes wrung from them—frequently by means of torture—by a ruthless and despotic state".\*

This meant that with the advent of the new epoch the old methods of colonial exploitation began to be adapted for new goals, the extortion of raw materials for Britain's own needs at home.

The intensified exploitation of India as a source of raw materials and a market for industrial goods served to promote the development of commodity-money relations in both the Indian towns and villages. The growth of simple commodity production at a time when the capitalist mode of production was still in the process of formation provided for the further penetration of trading and usury capital into the sphere of agricultural production and the crafts industry.

Representatives of the merchants' and money-lenders' castes, who in feudal times had monopolised the trading and credit operations (*banyas*, *marwaris*, etc.) strove to settle in the regions now geared to a single-crop culture, particularly in the Punjab, and Western and

\* Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. III, Moscow, 1974, p. 726.



Central India. The capital put into circulation by Indian traders and money-lenders developed the lower and middle links in India's system of commodity distribution—from the powerful British or Indian wholesaler, conducting export-import deals, to the consumer and producer—the Indian peasant and artisan.

The accumulation of money capital by Indian traders and money-lenders had two important socio-economic consequences: the introduction of traders' and money-lenders' castes into the landowning sector of the population, on the one hand, and the emergence of the pre-conditions for the formation of a national industry on the other.

### **The Growing Indebtedness and Landlessness of the Peasants**

In the sixties and the seventies, in the *rayatwari* areas land survey and settlement operations begun before the uprising of 1857-1859 had been completed. During the introduction of the new land cadaster the proprietary rights to private landownership enjoyed by the *rayats* were finally settled.

The consolidation of rights to private landownership in a situation where the development of commodity-money relations was accelerating meant that land acquired value and was drawn more and more into market commodity circulation. There was a rather steep rise in prices on land which exceeded the general rise in prices on agricultural produce. The purchase of land in the context of undeveloped capitalist enterprise came to constitute the most advantageous way in which traders, money-lenders and feudal lords could invest the money they had accumulated.

Insofar as land came to be regarded as the best means of security for the money-lender's credit, the mortgaging of land became the main method through which traders, money-lenders and feudal lords were able to seize the peasants' lands.

In the North-Western Provinces, for example, between 1840 and the early 1870s approximately a million acres came into the hands of "non-agriculturists", and their share of the land increased from ten to twenty-seven per cent. In the Punjab in the sixties and early seventies traders and money-lenders acquired forty-five per cent of all land sold. This stripping the peasants of their land proceeded at a particularly alarming speed in Maharashtra, where in the Satara district, for example, approximately a third of all farming land had been taken over by money-lenders by the end of the 1870s.

This was why in *rayatwari* regions and the Punjab new landowners, in addition to those of the feudal type, appeared, namely from the ranks of the traders and money-lenders.

The transfer of land to the money-lenders, traders and landlords did not change the economic basis of Indian farming. The peasant, now

no longer the owner of his holding, continued to cultivate it, now as tenant burdened with crippling rent. The extent of land leased to peasants and the number of tenant-farmers increased. At the same time there was also an increase in the number of people whose main source of income was land rent; the class of feudal landowners also grew in number—in the period 1881-1891, according to census data, it grew from two and a half to four million.

The growing tide of discontent among the peasantry in the 1840s, 1850s and 1860s, and in particular during the uprising (1857-1859), forced the colonialists to pass laws regulating the landlord-tenant relations in Bengal, the North-Western Provinces, the Punjab and the Central Provinces in the three decades that followed the uprising. These laws nominally restricted the feudal exploitation of the more privileged groups of tenant farmers at the hands of the *zamindar* landowners. However in practice the landowners were demanding from the peasants rents that were equal to half or more of their crops. In addition the peasants had to perform numerous obligations in the service of their feudal lords.

Colonial tenancy legislation, that was aimed at keeping in check the discontent of the Indian peasantry, in practice served to promote feudal methods of its exploitation. At the same time however the consolidation of the rights of occupancy of the upper strata of the tenant-farmers and the transformation of these rights into an object of sale and purchase, certain restrictions on rent increases and encouragement for the replacement of rent in kind by rent in money, all served to create a strata of prosperous peasants, a development which in a situation where the main mass of tenant-farmers was becoming more and more impoverished, created conditions promoting the class stratification of the peasantry.

Property differences within the peasantry, which could be traced back to the days of the feudal village community, were emerging on a new socio-economic basis, when the acquisition of land by the richer peasants and owners of money capital was paving the way for the future emergence of capitalist relations in Indian agriculture. This was an important contributing factor in relation to the subsequent intensification of internal contradictions within feudal society.

The adoption by the British bourgeoisie of new methods of colonial exploitation—namely the export of capital—served to accelerate the development of the capitalist mode of production in India.

### **India Becomes a Sphere of Investment for British Capital**

In the middle of the nineteenth century India began to be used as a sphere of investment for British capital. The first major outlet for British investment in India was that provided by the railways. The exploitation of India as a source of raw materials and as a market



demanded modern means of communication and transport. In the 1860s-1890s there was an increase in the length of the railways from 1,300 kilometres to 25,600 kilometres. The arrangement of the railway network, which fanned out into the interior from the main ports and linked together the main British strongholds in India, was dictated above all by military and strategic considerations.

The building of the railways was designed in such a way as to facilitate the enslavement and exploitation of the country by British colonialists. This came strikingly to the fore in the tariff system laid down for rates of freight haulage. On lines which linked regions of the interior tariffs were higher than on those leading from the interior to the ports. This served to promote transport geared to export and hampered the development of commodity circulation within the country. The railways were built with three different gauges—broad, metre and narrow—which made transportation within the country considerably more expensive than it would otherwise have been, since freight had to be reloaded at junctions.

The building of the railways proved a regular “gold-mine” for British businessmen, for the colonial authorities guaranteed the companies maximum profits regardless of their actual expenditure. The squandering extravagance of British contractors was paid for by the blood and sweat of the Indian taxpayers.

The second important sphere for British capital investment was the construction of irrigation installations. They were built in regions where crops were cultivated for export (in Sind and the Punjab for example, the main bases where cotton and wheat for export were grown). Making use of the water-rates the British were able not only to cover their outlays at the peasants’ expense, but also to make enormous profits. Irrigation installations and railways were as a rule owned by Britain.

An important sphere for the investment of private capital after the middle of the nineteenth century was provided by the plantations. The British colonial state in India encouraged the setting up of plantations for the cultivation of tea, coffee and rubber by selling or leasing land suitable for these crops to planters on favourable terms.

British capital was also invested in the building of factories and mines. (British capitalists owned the jute factories in Calcutta and the cotton mills in Cawnpore.) New stimulus for such undertakings had been provided by the extension of the railways: coal was needed for the locomotives and metal for the rails. By the end of the nineteenth century a small metallurgical works owned by the British was operating in Calcutta; the coal used for fuel was being mined in India on the spot. The exploitation of the railway lines already opened made necessary the setting up of repair workshops, small iron foundries and plants for the production of spare parts.

The new approach to India as an object of exploitation along imperialist lines (the import of capital and the intensified export of raw materials) was a historical inevitability. As Lenin pointed out:

“Two important distinguishing features of imperialism were already observed in Great Britain in the middle of the nineteenth century—vast colonial possessions and a monopolist position in the world market.”\*

The British imperialists making use of all the methods of colonial exploitation—taxation, import of manufactured goods, export of raw materials—were draining this enslaved country of enormous colonial “tribute”, which amounted to close on a hundred million pounds a year. In 1881 Marx made the following comment on the situation in India: “What the English take from them annually in the form of rent, dividends for railways useless to the Hindus; pensions for military and civil servicemen, for Afghanistan and other wars, etc., etc.—what they take from them *without any equivalent and quite apart* from what they appropriate to themselves annually *within* India,—speaking only of the *value of the commodities* the Indians have *gratuitously* and annually *to send over to England*—it amounts to *more than the total sum of income of the 60 millions of agricultural and industrial labourers of India!* This is a bleeding process with a vengeance! The famine years are pressing each other and in dimensions till now not yet suspected in Europe!”\*\*

### The Growth of Indian Capitalist Enterprise

The appearance in India of large capitalist enterprises (factories, railways, plantations) stimulated the development of India’s national capitalism. The wider scope now open to traders and money-lenders promoted the accumulation of money capital in the country. A great deal of money was accumulated by Indian merchants acting in a middleman or comprador capacity.

It was in this period that the labour market also began to take shape. Ruined craftsmen and impoverished peasants provided the first detachments of a working class for the plantations, construction work, and the first factories and textile mills.

This meant that in the second half of the nineteenth century two of the main conditions for the development of the capitalist mode of production had been fulfilled: workmen “free” of the means of production had appeared on the scene and the primary accumulation of capital had taken place (accumulation by Indian merchants and compradors).

The development of capitalism in India proceeded along two parallel paths. Capitalist manufactories started to grow up on the basis of former craftsmen’s workshops and these were able to withstand competition from the large factories by resorting to extreme forms of

\* V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 22, p. 283.

\*\* Marx, Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, Moscow, 1975, p. 317.



exploitation (capitalist methods were combined with the grip of money-lenders and the tyranny of higher castes over the lower ones) and by using cheap imported or locally produced semi-finished goods. On the basis of mill-produced yarn there was a re-emergence of hand-weaving—in the framework of manufactory production. In various parts of India (particularly in Maharashtra, Madras, and the North-Western Provinces) large centres for specialised cottage industries were set up. According to the census of 1891 forty-five million people (counting workers together with their families) were employed in the cottage industries. By the end of the 1890s workers employed in these small-scale industries consumed two and a half times as much cotton yarn as the cotton-weaving factories.

The yoke of the colonialists was felt particularly keenly by the craftsmen as well as by the owners and workers in the manufactories. They had to cope with competition from British enterprises producing similar goods, endure heavy taxation and ruthless treatment at the hands of the colonial administration.

The mass of urban and rural craftsmen, the workers from the workshops and manufactories, small-scale employers and traders constituted the largest force within India's national liberation movement after the peasantry.

Apart from these enterprises, where work was done by hand, the country's first large-scale factories started to appear in the middle of the nineteenth century. Bombay became the leading centre of large-scale industry in India. Their trading activities enabled the Bombay merchants and compradors to accumulate considerable capital (for the most part these men were from the Parsee community and the traders' and money-lenders' caste of the Marwari). They conducted their transactions on a large scale and due to their mediatory participation in the opium trade were rather well acquainted not only with the Chinese markets but with those of the Far East as a whole. During the 1840s, 1850s and 1860s the larger Bombay trading houses maintained representatives in Britain and were able to observe at first hand the development of large-scale industry.

In this situation the Bombay merchants embarked on the construction of cotton mills which, right up till the beginning of the twentieth century, were oriented towards the production of cotton yarn mainly for China and other Far Eastern markets.

In 1854 the first textile mill in Bombay opened its gates, and in 1861 another in the town of Ahmadabad, which was to become the second most important textile centre in the country.

In the last three decades of the nineteenth century cotton mills belonging to British capitalists (in Bombay and Kanpur) were also opened. However the jute mills concentrated in Calcutta and its immediate neighbourhood were to remain the bulwark of British private capital. Many enterprises engaged in the initial processing of agricultural raw materials were also owned by British capital.

By the end of the nineteenth century in large-scale production (i.e. on the factories and plantations) two-thirds of the shares were in British hands and only one-third belonged to Indians, which points to the domination of the British in large-scale capitalist enterprise in India.

### **The Formation of New Classes and the Aggravation of National Contradictions**

The development of capitalism paved the way for the emergence of a working class. The uneven development of large-scale industry led to its concentration in the most developed provinces of the country: Bombay and Bengal. The overall total of workers employed at large-scale factories, on the railways and in the mines came to eight hundred thousand by the end of the nineteenth century. The majority of these workers were from the textile industry.

The living and working conditions of the Indian workers were terrible. Factory workers' wages were so low, that as a rule they were insufficient for a man to keep his family on. This explains why in the early decades of large-scale industry the majority of the workers were from the villages who had owned or leased tiny holdings. It also explains why the labour of women and children was used so extensively in the factories and mines.

In addition to capitalist exploitation the workers were also exposed to various non-economic forms of coercion and debt-bondage.

In the last three decades of the nineteenth century the working week at Indian factories was eighty hours (compared to 56 in the British ones). The working day was as long as sixteen hours: it usually started fifteen minutes before sunrise and finished fifteen minutes after sunset, because there was no electric light in the workshops.

This extreme form of exploitation of the Indian workers was the main factor ensuring that Indian factory-owners could hold their own in the market, where they faced competition from British industrialists.

The British owners of textile mills, anxious to outstrip the Indian industrialists by a still greater margin than before by putting up production costs, began through their representatives in the British Parliament to demand the introduction of factory legislation in India. However this move was opposed not only by Indian factory-owners but also by some British owners of large-scale Indian factories. The passing of the relevant legislation did not modify in any essential way the degree of exploitation to which the Indian working class was subjected. The laws of 1881 and 1891 laid down a minimum age for child labour, first seven and then nine. The working day for children and youths was also restricted. This legislation, which was very inadequately enforced, in itself points to the grim position of the Indian working class.



The British bourgeoisie extorted a heavy "tribute" from the developing national industry in India by supplying equipment and materials at a high price by virtue of its various monopolies. Salaries demanded for engineers and technicians were considerably higher than those paid in Britain. Once again the means of meeting these additional expenses was still greater exploitation of the Indian working class, which was thus the victim of a double yoke—that of the Indian and foreign bourgeoisie.

The British bourgeoisie, making use of its political domination in India, impeded wherever possible India's independent economic development. In 1879 Lancashire factory-owners managed to have the duties on imported cotton fabrics in India lifted, which meant that the young Indian textile industry would not be in a position to compete with the most powerful one in the world, namely that of Britain. In 1882 tariffs on other British goods imported into India were also lifted. In 1894 for financial reasons the tariffs on imported fabrics were reintroduced, but at the same time an excise levy was placed on Indian mass-produced fabrics.

Another serious obstacle was the lack of organised capitalist credit facilities. British banks in India gave credit only to the colonial apparatus, British trading houses and industrial enterprises, and were concerned for the most part with foreign-trade operations. In this situation Indian factory-owners found themselves dependent on the so-called managing agencies, branches of large British monopolies. These agencies supplied essential credit and industrial equipment, but after a factory had been made operational they often took charge of its running, ensuring supplies of raw materials and markets for the finished products. Considerable sums were deducted from the Indian factory owners' profits in the interests of these managing agencies.

The fact that feudal practices were still rife in agriculture and that the villages and petty industrial production were dominated by trading and usury capital severely curtailed the opportunities for the country's capitalist development.

From the earliest stages of its formation as a class the young Indian bourgeoisie came up against the economic and political yoke of imperialist rule. However, this oppression combined with feudal exploitation and that at the hands of traders and money-lenders made itself felt most of all in the small-commodity sector, in agriculture and the crafts industry.

Exploitation at the hands of the colonialists, feudal lords, traders and money-lenders led to mass impoverishment of the peasants, craftsmen and working masses, and this poverty went hand in hand with widespread famine in years with bad harvests. Famine struck India twice between 1825 and 1850 and took a toll of 400,000 lives, six times between 1850 and 1875, but eighteen times between 1875 and 1900 and the death toll had risen accordingly to first five and then 26 million.

The intensification of colonial exploitation, accompanied at the

same time by a worsening of the oppression suffered at the hands of the feudal lords and money-lenders, and also the development of capitalism, that was giving rise to the formation of the classes that constitute bourgeois society, led to deepening class contradictions within the country and also between the various classes of Indian society and the British imperialists.

The capitalist sector represented an island in a sea of peasant holdings and craftsmen enterprises run on a semi-barter basis and which were part of a pre-capitalist pattern. This factor shaped the distinctive features of the social and class structure of this colonial-feudal society. And this found reflection in the content and forms of the struggle of classes.

#### THE NATIONAL LIBERATION STRUGGLE OF THE PEOPLES OF INDIA BETWEEN THE 1860s AND THE 1890s

The most striking illustration of the internal and external contradictions to be observed in Indian society was the unrest among the masses (peasants and craftsmen) in the period between the 1860s and the 1890s.

#### Peasant Action in Bengal

The first major incident involving the rural population was the so-called indigo revolt in East Bengal in the years 1859-1862.

British managers owning small establishments for the manufacture of the dye indigo used to purchase from *zamindar* landowners the right to draw rents from the *rayats* over a period of several years and compelled the latter to cultivate indigo-bearing plants. The peasants were obliged to hand over the whole of their harvest to these "planters" at prices dictated from above. Gradually on account of their growing indebtedness the *rayats* found themselves at the mercy of the British planters, who introduced a reign of terror into the villages.

The peasant movement aimed against the system of coercive contracting took the form of a refusal to cultivate indigo bushes and pay off old debts to the planters. The uprising which began spontaneously in a number of villages quickly spread through five districts of Bengal. Attempts by the planters to put down the strike of the *rayats* by force met with stubborn resistance and led to attacks against the estates of the planters themselves.

The scale of the movement alarmed the colonial administration to such an extent that the committee set up to investigate these developments called for the abolition of the system of coercive contracting.

Despite the fact that punitive detachments of the military police were sent to the villages to which the movement had spread, the



struggle continued for almost three years. As a result the *rayats*—the hereditary tenants—achieved a major victory: the system of coercive contracting was abolished. Many planters called a halt to their activities in the districts gripped by the strike.

During this movement seeds of a peasant organisation were sown. The peasant unions (*rayat sabha*) played a more significant role during the next large-scale uprising of the Bengal peasants (1872-1873).

While the "indigo revolt" was aimed against British entrepreneurs, the peasant uprising in the Bengal districts of Pabna and Bogra was anti-feudal in character. The immediate cause of the uprising was the wholesale increase in land-rent rates introduced by *zamindar* landowners after 1871, when the Calcutta High Court interpreted certain clauses of the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1859 in favour of the landlords.

The peasants plundered the houses of the *zamindars* and destroyed the rent contracts and rent receipts. The movement was led by organisations which called themselves leagues of insurgents (*bidrohi*). In the wake of the peasant unrest in Pabna and Bogra that was cruelly suppressed by the colonialists, a new act was passed to regulate tenancy relations in Bengal, which extended the category of protected tenants to some extent.

#### Unrest of the Masses in North and North-West India

Apart from peasant revolts which had both anti-feudal and anti-colonial implications, mass protest also manifested itself in the traditional form of religious and sectarian movements. Not only the economy was dominated by feudal practices but feudal principles and attitudes still held captive the minds of the vast majority of the population, which meant that the struggle against the feudal lords and foreign oppressors often manifested itself in a struggle to uphold "the true faith". Despite the defeat of the uprising of 1857-1859 the British did not succeed in wiping out completely the movement of the Wahhabis, who had played a prominent role in leading the uprising. At the beginning of the sixties the Wahhabis once again set up their own secret organisation centred in Patna (Bihar province) and began energetically to prepare for new armed action against the colonialists. This organisation included not only peasants and craftsmen: among its leaders there were minor officials, traders and members of the intelligentsia.

In Sitana, which was situated in the Pathan tribal area, there was a large military camp which the Wahhabis had set up on an earlier occasion and where volunteers now started gathering and secretly collecting supplies of arms and stores. Sitana in the minds of the leaders of the sect was to become the stronghold of the uprising,

which would be waged as a holy war (*jihad*) against the infidels, i.e. the British.

In 1863 the British sent out against the insurgents in Sitana a whole army corps, and it was only at the cost of many lives, after they had succeeded in severing the Afghan tribes who had been supporting the Wahhabis, that the British were able to crush this centre of revolt. In 1864 other Wahhabi strongholds in Patna and Delhi were laid waste and after that the movement gradually began to subside.

In the Punjab an anti-feudal and anti-colonial struggle began to gather momentum during the 1860s-1880s, as manifested in the activities of the Namdhari Sikh sect which had been founded in the early part of the century.

The sect intensified its struggle after leadership was assumed in 1846 by Ram Singh, the son of a carpenter. In 1863 Ram Singh started to propagate his own exposition of the Namdhari teaching, in which he put forward demands that his followers should refuse to use British goods or to serve in institutions of the colonial administration. Ram Singh, who in his day had served in the army, carried out a reform of the sect's organisational structure, introducing a clearly defined military-type organisation in the districts, tahsils and villages. The sect established contacts with those Sikhs who were serving in the Sepoy units of the colonial army. The Namdharis, whose numbers had now swelled to close on 50,000 and who were well organised and unquestionably loyal to Ram Singh, constituted a serious force, particularly since they had received military training. For this reason the sect was placed under the strictest possible police surveillance.

In the second half of the 1860s the sect concentrated its activities against the Sikh feudal lords who had appropriated temple lands which had formerly belonged to the entire Sikh community. However a number of open attacks by the Namdharis were crushed by the British with the support of local Sikh feudal lords.

In the late sixties and early seventies the activity of the sect assumed more of a religious and a communal character. Ram Singh protested strongly against this aspect of the sect's activity, for he realised that the British were making capital out of this in order to fan Sikh-Moslem conflict and thus put an end to the movement.

However within the sect a strong opposition group started to take shape, which despite Ram Singh's protest decided in the middle of January 1872 to attack the ruler of the small Punjab state, Maler Kotla.

En route for Maler Kotla over a hundred Namdharis attacked the Malodh fortress, the residence of a Sikh feudal lord who had earlier actively assisted the British in their repression of the Sikh sect. The attackers were counting on arming themselves with what they would find in the fortress. However their attempts to seize both Malodh and Maler Kotla ended in a fiasco. The Namdharis were scattered by detachments of forces from the neighbouring Sikh principalities. The



treacherous princes again showed themselves to be loyal supporters of the British in the repression of popular movements.

At the command of the British the Namdharis who had been taken prisoners were mowed down with cannon fire, without trial. This barbarous act of repression was depicted in a canvas by the great Russian painter Vereshchagin, who visited India in 1875.

After this unsuccessful action of 1872 the Namdhari sect was subjected to savage reprisals. Its leaders including Ram Singh were banished to Burma for life.

Some time after these incidents a new wave of mass unrest began in West and South India.

### **The Peasant Movement in Maharashtra. The Revolt Led by Vasudev Bulwant Phadke**

Maharashtra was a region where the peasants were being stripped of their land, which was coming into the hands of the money-lenders at a particularly rapid rate. This stemmed from the fact that after the middle of the nineteenth century and particularly during the period of the cotton boom of the 1860s regions of Western and Central India were quickly reorganised for the production of commercial, export crops, which led to the development of commodity-money relations in the rural areas and a more active role there for the capital of traders and money-lenders.

The peasant movement in Maharashtra thus assumed the form of opposition to the money-lenders. The peasants seized and destroyed their debt registers, and when they met with resistance they used to drive money-lenders out of the villages and destroy their houses. The peasant movement in this part of the country developed into an armed struggle. In 1873-1875 armed peasant detachments were active in all districts of Maharashtra, the largest of which was under the command of a peasant leader named Kengliya. The peasants referred to him as the "debtors' friend". After British punitive forces succeeded in capturing Kengliya and destroying the main detachments of the insurgent peasants in 1876, the movement's strength was undermined for a time. However in 1878-1879 in the Bombay province there appeared new detachments of armed peasants, mainly from the Ramusi tribe, who as a rule were in debt bondage from landlords and money-lenders. Prosperous peasants from the dominant agriculturist castes also joined this movement.

In 1876-1878 the Bombay province was hit by a terrible famine. However the British proceeded to raise the tax on salt and in 1878 introduced a patent levy to be exacted from Indian entrepreneurs and traders; these measures served to fan anti-British feeling among wide strata of the population. Protest meetings and demonstrations were held in many places. The movement reached its high-point in 1878

when traders and artisans from the town of Surat in the Bombay province rallied against the British.

The movement of peasants, artisans and traders in Maharashtra covering the period 1870-1880 which developed into an armed struggle paved the way for the heroic revolt led by Vasudev Bulwant Phadke (1845-1883).

Phadke came from an impoverished family which had at one time been in the service of the Maratha Peshwas. He received an education and had a command of both Sanskrit and English. When Phadke had worked as a minor official in one of the administrative departments in Poona he had experienced first-hand the humiliations to which the Indian petty-bourgeois intelligentsia was subjected. Possessed of an inquiring mind and an ardently patriotic spirit, Phadke soon came to feel a deep hatred for his country's foreign oppressors.

Initially he agitated against the British among the Maratha youth in Poona and then he started preparing to carry out his long-term plan, namely to prepare an armed uprising to overthrow the British colonial regime. In the spring of 1879 after establishing contact with the leader of the rebel peasants, Hari Naik, he formed a detachment. His activity was initially aimed at the local money-lenders and feudal lords, whose valuables he expropriated. His plan was to use the money collected in this way to hire professional fighting men and build up a large detachment. This detachment would then attack centres of colonial administration, block important lines of communication and transport routes, and thus provide the signal for an uprising throughout Maharashtra, which would then spread to the rest of the country.

In these plans Phadke had counted on the support of the broad peasant masses of Maharashtra, and, indeed, with their active support he was able in the spring and summer of 1879 to launch bold attacks and make various large-scale expropriations. However, his weak military organisation and the tremendous numerical superiority of the punitive forces sent out to suppress the movement were such that by the middle of the summer the main forces of the detachment had been routed. Phadke himself was taken prisoner, tried at the British court in Poona and sentenced to hard labour for life.

In the districts where his detachment operated Phadke circulated appeals to the British authorities in which he laid out the main points of his programme: lower taxes, the organisation of public works and a reduction in the high salaries paid to British colonial officials. If his programme were not adopted, Phadke threatened to mount an uprising throughout the whole of Maharashtra. From the diaries that Phadke left behind him it is clear that he devoted considerable attention in his programme to the development of Indian-owned industry and commerce. His political views were eclectic—a naive combination of republican and monarchist ideals.

However the ideology and practical activity of this man were permeated with a profound hatred of the colonial regime, a resolve to



achieve national independence by means of an armed struggle.

Phadke's campaign was noteworthy as the first popular uprising in which the national liberation struggle and the struggle against the local money-lenders were merged together as one. It was also the first example of a struggle in which the popular masses were campaigning shoulder to shoulder with the radical wing of the petty-bourgeois democrats.

### The Uprising in Rampa

At the same time as Phadke's campaign a large peasant uprising flared up in the Madras Presidency, in the Rampa area, on the Godavari River.

The immediate cause that sparked off this uprising, whose driving force was initially provided by the mountain tribesmen who had settled in Rampa, was the decision by the British authorities to raise taxes and also the oppression on the part of the tax-farmer who collected the taxes from the whole region. The movement was led by minor feudal landowners and village headmen. Between March and July 1879 isolated sorties by groups of armed peasants developed into a full-scale guerrilla war, which continued with variable success until the middle of 1880.

This uprising, in the course of which several large detachments of insurgents were formed, spread over a wide area in the Godavari and Vizagapatam districts, which had a population of over two million. The peasants in the districts where the insurgents were operating afforded them substantial help. Making full use of the advantages offered by this mountainous and wooded terrain and employing skilful guerrilla tactics, the insurgents were able to inflict serious losses on the numerically superior forces of the regular army sent out to put down the uprising. The insurgents armed themselves with what they captured from their enemies and managed to seize from the police posts.

By the middle of 1879 the whole of the Rampa region, and the districts immediately adjacent to it, were in the hands of the insurgents who even succeeded in capturing and burning one of the two steamships sent up the River Godavari with troops to quell their uprising.

However the insurgents had no programme and the uprising was utterly spontaneous in character. There was no unity among the leaders of the various detachments, who only achieved co-ordinated action on rare occasions. Another factor which complicated matters was the varied class composition of the movement, which embraced both the poorest of peasants and minor feudal lords. When British colonial officials, policemen, money-lenders and tax-farmers were driven out and the goal of the uprising virtually achieved, the leaders of the detachments proclaimed themselves "rajahs" or "maharajahs".

After deciding not to rely on force of arms alone, the British staked their fortunes on discord between the individual leaders of the uprising, on conspiracy and bribes. In the autumn of 1879 one of the finest commanders of the insurgent detachments, namely Ammal Reddi, was betrayed to the British, and then in February 1880 the most outstanding figure of the movement, Dharakond Chendriya, was treacherously murdered by one of his retainers.

After Chendriya's death the uprising started to subside. Isolated detachments continued to defend themselves in the wilds of Rampa against the British punitive detachments. However after the death of the last major guerrilla leader, a comrade-in-arms of Chendriya, Tamman Dhora, resistance virtually came to an end in July 1880.

In addition to these large-scale campaigns of the popular masses, in the 1870s and early 1880s there was also unrest among the native tribesmen (the Bhils, Santals, Gonds, Lushais, Kukis, Nagas, etc.) in Central and North-East India. This was in protest at their enslavement and the expropriation of their lands by the feudal landowners and money-lenders from the neighbouring, more advanced nationalities. These outbreaks of unrest were usually openly anti-colonial in character, for they were aimed against the local colonial administration.

Political awakening was also making its way to the peoples of those principalities that constituted "reserves of feudalism" and bastions of British rule in India. In 1874 there was large-scale anti-British protests in the town of Baroda, the capital of a principality by the same name in Western India, triggered off by the removal of the local ruler from power. In the Maratha principality of Kolhapur a conspiracy was brought to light in 1880 against the ruler of the principality and his colonial patrons, which represented an echo of Phadke's movement.

Popular movements between 1860 and the early 1880s were of a localised and usually spontaneous character, and those who participated in them had no clear political programme and often campaigned in the name of their religion or their naive monarchism. Nevertheless, the fact that these movements were joined by the peasant masses, craftsmen, and in some instances by petty traders, and by the emergent petty-bourgeois intelligentsia, and that manifestations of popular discontent were taking place in all the main regions of the country, and that more resolute forms of struggle, including armed uprisings, were being organised, meant that the popular movements of this period had come to represent a serious threat to British colonial rule in India. The country was in fact on the brink of a new revolutionary crisis.

However the anti-colonial and anti-feudal action of the peasants and artisans on their own were not enough to destroy the colonial regime. Meanwhile the new classes of bourgeois society—the working class and the national bourgeoisie—which might have led a national liberation struggle, were as yet only at an early stage of their political formation.



### The Beginning of the Workers' Movement

The largest concentration of the working class was that in the textile industry. This explains why workers from the cotton mills emerged as leaders in the struggle of the Indian working class against its oppressors. The first workers' strike took place in 1877 at one of the textile mills in the town of Nagpur, Central India. Between 1882 and 1890 twenty-five strikes took place in the Bombay and Madras provinces. Apart from industrial and railway workers, loaders and workers from public utilities also took part in the strike movement. These first strikes began spontaneously, were of short duration and strictly localised. The strikers put forward economic demands.

The most active contingent of the Indian working class was that in Bombay. It was there that the first attempts were made to set up workers' organisations—forerunners of the trade unions. In 1884 Bombay saw its first mass meeting of textile-workers, at which a resolution was adopted demanding that there must be one free day, that the duration of the working day be restricted, etc. That same year the first organisation for textile-workers was set up by N. M. Lokhande, a Maratha white-collar worker at one of the Bombay factories. However its membership was very unstable. This organisation also published a newspaper in Marathi called *Dinabandhu* (Friend of the Poor) of a bourgeois philanthropical slant.

In the late eighties and early nineties the strike movement gradually intensified. There were hardly any factories that did not see one or two strikes a year. Apart from the proletariat of Bombay the workers of Calcutta, Madras, Ahmadabad and other towns also became involved in the struggle. Women workers too were beginning to take an ever more active part in it.

The activities of the Bombay workers' association also intensified. In 1889 a second mass meeting of Bombay's textile-workers was organised by Lokhande. The association was coming more and more to resemble a reformist trade union of the British type. Even at this early stage of the workers' movement in India, the bourgeoisie was attempting to foist upon it its own ideology.

After the comparative lull of the eighties, following on the repressions of the British colonial authorities, the strike movement intensified in the nineties. This intensification coincided with a new wave of popular unrest, the centres of which were the principalities.

### Popular Unrest in the 1890s

In 1890, in the small principality of Cambay in Western India, insurgent peasants forced the Nawab to flee and scored considerable successes. The British authorities, who were now forced to interfere

in the internal affairs of the principality and officially remove the Nawab from power, reduced the land tax.

The largest outbreak of popular unrest in this period was the uprising in the principality of Manipur in 1891. In this principality of Eastern India a group of feudal lords had come to power in the autumn of 1890 after a palace coup d'état; they were led by the brother of the deposed rajah, who at the time actually was de facto ruler of the principality. Once it had come to British ears that the regent, Takendrajit Singh, entertained anti-British sentiments, they sent a detachment to Imphal, capital of the Manipur principality. In March 1891 the British, meeting no resistance on their way, marched into Imphal. However, after an unsuccessful attempt to capture the palace, the British detachment found itself virtually besieged in the house of the British resident in Imphal. After losing a considerable portion of their detachment, including a number of officers, the British retreated.

The defeat of this British detachment caused panic among the colonial authorities in Calcutta, and in April of that year a large military expedition was equipped to set off for Manipur. Despite resistance from the population of the principality, which succeeded in destroying a number of British military strongholds and all means of communication, the British took Imphal and laid waste to it; they took Takendrajit Singh prisoner and executed him and other leaders of the uprising. A British official was then appointed regent for the new child-prince.

This uprising in Manipur was the last anti-colonial action of the masses that was led by feudal elements.

Also in 1891 an anti-feudal uprising broke out in the principality of Keonjhar in Eastern India.

During the last decade of the nineteenth century in India itself no major actions of the popular masses were recorded, however in the border territories the colonialists met firm resistance on the part of the Pathan tribes in the west and the Nagas in the east.

The struggle of the Afghan tribes intensified in particular after 1893, when an agreement was reached between the British colonial authorities and the Afghan Amir Abdurrahman over border claims. As a result a large number of Afghan tribesmen found themselves cut off from Afghanistan by the Durand Line and came into the sphere of British influence. Attempts by the British to set up forts in the territory of these tribes and levy taxes from the Pathans met with armed resistance from the mountain peoples.

The largest of these uprisings took place in 1894, 1895 and 1897. The British succeeded in suppressing the latter by bringing out forty thousand soldiers from various types of units, including artillery.

However even after that Britain's military and political control in areas settled by the Pathan border tribes as well as in the north-eastern borderlands was far from firm.



## THE EMERGENCE OF BOURGEOIS NATIONALISM AND ITS VARIOUS TRENDS

The development of capitalism in India and the emergence of an Indian national bourgeoisie led to the birth of a bourgeois-national movement. Popular anti-colonial and anti-imperialist movements had exerted a major influence on the political formation of the Indian bourgeoisie.

The development of bourgeois nationalism in India passed through two stages. In various parts of the country there came into being in the 1860s and 1870s local political organisations of the bourgeoisie and the landlords. The next stage in the development of the bourgeois-national movement was its unification on a nation-wide scale in the mid-1880s.

### The Bourgeois-National Movement in the 1860s and 1870s

The first socio-political organisations of the bourgeoisie and the landlords emerged in the most economically advanced provinces of India—namely Bengal and Bombay. Ever since the forties the British India Association in Calcutta and the Bombay Presidency Association had been active. Both organisations served the interests of the powerful traders and compradors, and the upper echelons of the Indian intelligentsia drawn from the ranks of the bourgeoisie and the landlords. In addition it should be noted that within the British India Association the liberally inclined *zamindars* of Bengal enjoyed all-important influence.

The economic programmes of these organisations incorporated demands for reduced taxes and reduction of the expenses of the colonial administration. The political programme was also extremely limited: it was basically confined to the demand for the extension of opportunities to receive European education for the upper strata of Indian society (for subsequent promotion in the colonial administration) and to protest against the racial discrimination that was rampant in the country.

Popular uprisings led the moderates among the nationalists to seek still closer ties with the colonialists.

In a situation where the national liberation movement was gathering momentum the social significance of old organisations began rapidly to decrease. An objective need arose to create new, more radical organisations for the Indian bourgeois nationalists.

In 1870 in Maharashtra the Poona Sarwajanik Sabha (Union of the Common People of Poona) was formed, while in 1876 an India Association was set up in Calcutta. Both organisations started to

uphold more actively the economic and political interests of the Indian bourgeoisie.

From the very outset there was no unity within the new organisations (as indeed throughout the bourgeois-national movement). The inside history of the bourgeois-national movement is characterised by the emergence and development within it of two main trends: the liberal and democratic trends.

From 1860 to the beginning of the eighties the liberal wing dominated the organisation of the national movement, insofar as at that time petty-bourgeois democrats had not been able to set up their own organisations.

The liberals, whose main leaders were Surendranath Banerjea in Bengal, and Dadabhai Naoroji and M.G. Ranade in the Bombay Presidency, demanded from the colonial government that it implement a protectionist policy with regard to the new Indian industry, lower taxes and reduce colonial tribute. With regard to the agrarian question they were in favour of retaining the landlords' estates (provided that taxes were reduced) and promoting the gradual development of large-scale estates (like those of the Prussian Junkers).

Their political programme merely called for increased representation of the prosperous elite in Indian society in the deliberative bodies headed by the Viceroy and the provincial governors, and voiced protest against racial discrimination. They also asked that the age for the right to appear for civil service exams might be raised and that the exams be held both in India and Britain.

This last demand was dictated by the fact that the colonialists were endeavouring to retain their monopoly of well-paid posts in the colonial administrative apparatus in the interests of young Englishmen of bourgeois background. Because of this it had been laid down that only candidates up to twenty-two years of age might appear for the civil service exams that were held in London. This ruling virtually robbed the major part of the Indian intelligentsia of the chance to join the Indian civil service. At that time Indian students used to graduate from college at a later age than Englishmen did in their country, and in addition the journey to Britain was too expensive and complex an undertaking for young men from India, even those from the richest Indian families.

The tactics of the Indian liberals were just as cautious and moderate as their political programme. Petitions sent to Parliament and the British colonial authorities, the sending of delegations to the Viceroy or to Britain, timid protests in the press, resolutions adopted at meetings of national organisations—such were the forms of struggle to which the moderate wing of the national movement confined itself.

The liberals were highly critical of popular protest and were of the opinion that the colonial regime in the country should be preserved.



However within the national movement a left, radical wing was getting stronger. Petty-bourgeois democrats represented the lower strata of the commercial bourgeoisie, the owners of small industrial undertakings, the poorly paid sections of the intelligentsia—teachers, clerks, doctors—and they also maintained links with the impoverished petty landowners and the more prosperous strata of the peasantry.

In contrast to the liberals the petty-bourgeois democrats in Bengal were profoundly sympathetic to the anti-feudal struggle of the masses. During the Indigo Revolt the writer and democrat Dinabandhu Mitra wrote a play entitled *Nil Darpan* (Indigo Mirror) which exposed the system of coercive contracting. The play had a strong impact on progressive circles of Bengal's society. In 1873 during the uprising in Pabna a play by Mir Mashraf Hussain entitled *Zamindar Darpan* was published, which shed light on the arbitrary behaviour of the landlords that was typical of all *zamindars'* estates. Performances of this play in the villages using peasant actors helped to spread a revolutionary outlook among the *rayats* of Bengal.

The left wing of the Bengal nationalists hoped that mass action of the peasants would serve to bring about changes in the administrative system, undermine and eventually get rid of colonial oppression.

The anti-feudal nature of the socio-political views held by the petty-bourgeois democrats in Bengal resulted also from the fact that they upheld most consistently the interests of those who were in favour of bourgeois development in India.

The petty-bourgeois democrats saw as their main practical task the patriotic education of wide strata of the Indian petty-bourgeois youth. For this reason they gave first priority to the propaganda of their ideas in the press. The Ghosh brothers, Harishchandra Mukerji, the outstanding Bengali writer of that period Bankimchandra Chatterjee, and various others, propagated the ideas of petty-bourgeois nationalism in the newspapers and journals which they published. Their weakness lay in the fact that they had no political organisations of their own, separate from those of the liberals. The same weakness was to be found among the petty-bourgeois democrats of Maharashtra, which, after Bengal, was the second centre of the national movement in India.

The emergence of left, radical nationalism was linked here with the name of the outstanding Indian revolutionary and democrat, Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856-1920). Tilak, who came from an ancient line of Maratha Brahmans, had from an early age imbibed the traditions of the Marathas' liberation struggle that went back as far as the era when the Maratha state had been set up under Shivaji. All his political agitation was permeated with these national traditions. While still at college, Tilak made plans with a group of like-minded students for setting up a school, whose doors would be open to everyone and where Maratha youth would be educated in the spirit of Maratha national traditions. In 1880 the New English School was opened in

Poona, and the following year Tilak began to publish a newspaper by the name of *Kesari* (Lion) in Marathi and another in English called *Mahratta*.

In the articles that appeared in these publications and also in the lectures that they delivered at the schools, Tilak and his supporters showed themselves to be consistent champions of the interests of the whole of the Indian bourgeoisie. The way in which Tilak chose to support the interests of the Indian industrialists was through a boycott of British goods.

Like the petty-bourgeois democrats of Bengal Tilak campaigned to improve the material position of the masses, but he did not come forward with any clearly defined programme on the agrarian question.

Although he was sympathetic to the protests of the masses against the colonial regime, Tilak did not regard armed struggle as the right path by which to achieve independence. At this stage Tilak and his followers saw their main task as the preparation of the "masses" (i.e. the broad petty-bourgeois strata of society) for the future struggle to achieve independence.

The national movement in other parts of India apart from Maharashtra and Bengal had in the seventies and eighties not yet attained a similar level of development.

### The Beginnings of an All-India National Movement and the Setting Up of the National Congress

The British colonialists responded to the growth of the national liberation movement within the country with repressive measures. In 1878 Viceroy Lytton (1870-1880) passed the Indian Arms Act which stipulated that Indians were forbidden to possess firearms, even in order to defend themselves against wild animals. In the same year extremely harsh press laws were passed, which paved the way to the institution of a preliminary censorship for all publications in Indian languages and was truly repressive in character.

However these repressions did not achieve the desired results. This led the Liberal Party in Britain, after it came to power in 1880, to start to flirt with the Indian nationalists of bourgeois and landlord stock. The new Viceroy Ripon (1880-1884) revoked the press laws.

In 1882 most members of the municipal councils in the cities began to be elected by an élite of the propertied classes. While flirting with the Indian liberals Ripon supported a bill that had been drawn up by Ilbert, a member of the executive council, to keep racial discrimination out of the courts. However the resistance of the British bureaucracy and British businessmen ruined any chances of its being passed in Parliament and brought forward Ripon's retirement. The struggle over this issue led Indian nationalists to join forces and make their campaign nation-wide.



In the 1870s and early eighties a new revolutionary crisis was building up in India. The colonialists were particularly alarmed by the prospect of the radical wing of the bourgeois nationalists and the popular movement co-operating. A senior civil servant, Alan Hume, noted in one of his reports that if the representatives of the educated classes were to lead the popular uprisings, they would become more purposeful and could develop into a national uprising.

This explains why the colonialists supported the creation of a united political organisation embracing the whole of India that would be led by the liberals.

Close contacts between representatives of the various socio-political groups had been growing up since the end of the 1870s, and in 1883-1884 the first attempts were made to create an all-India organisation of nationalists.

Finally, in 1885, the first conference of the National Congress was convened in Bombay; it was the first all-India political organisation of the landlords and the bourgeoisie. It was set up with the approval of the authorities, and Hume, at the request of the Viceroy, Lord Dufferin (1884-1888), was made its General Secretary.

The National Congress gave voice to the interests of the upper strata of the Indian bourgeoisie and the landlords, who held nationalist sympathies. Fifty per cent of the delegates to the first six sessions of the Congress belonged to sectors of the intelligentsia drawn from the bourgeoisie and the landowning classes, twenty-five per cent of the delegates represented the interests of those engaged in trade and usury, and twenty-five per cent were landlords.

The Congress was dominated by the liberal wing of the national movement. However it went somewhat further in its programme: more consistent demands were made for the protection and development of national industry, for tax reduction, and the creation within India of a system of organised capitalist credit. The Congress protested more forcefully than before at the discrimination against the Indian industry inherent in the colonialists' tariff policy. Industrial conferences and exhibitions were now organised in order to encourage, under the auspices of the Congress, the development of national industry. The agrarian programme of the Congress amounted to a demand for the introduction of a permanent settlement all over the country.

Isolated as they were from the masses, the Indian liberals feared their own people. In 1893 Naoroji announced at a session of the Congress that the government must be firm and just. He stated that its immediate task was to put down with a firm hand any lawlessness or any attempt to disrupt civic peace.

The main political demand put forward by the Congress was that the composition of the legislative councils be broadened and consist of an elected majority chosen from among representatives of the bourgeoisie and the landowning upper strata of Indian society. In 1892 the representation of these strata was increased to some extent.

After the National Congress had been set up, the struggle between various groups within the national movement intensified. By the middle of the nineties Tilak succeeded in securing the support of the majority of leaders of the Poona Sarwajanik Sabha. By this time he had become the acknowledged leader of the country's petty-bourgeois democrats. His articles in the newspaper *Mahratta* exerted a major influence on the development of radical nationalism in other provinces as well.

In 1895 Tilak began to organise mass celebrations in the honour of the god Ganesha and the Marathas' national hero Shivaji. These festivals soon developed into a political forum at which Tilak's supporters carried out political agitation among the masses. Similar festivals were organised in Bengal.

However the religious, Hindu connotations of the activities engaged in by Tilak's supporters had their negative aspects as well. At the beginning of the eighties in an effort to counter bourgeois nationalism and with the active support of the British, Moslem cultural organisations increased their activities and this meant that an element of Hindu-Moslem conflict was introduced to the national movement.

The leader of this movement was Sayyid Ahmad Khan, who represented the more enlightened of the Moslem feudal lords and powerful merchants. It was he who had set up societies for promoting enlightenment of Moslems and had founded the Aligarh College, that trained young Moslems to staff the colonial administrative machine. Sayyid Ahmad Khan was an ardent supporter of the colonial regime.

Apart from this movement started by Sayyid Ahmad Khan, there was also an organisation of petty-bourgeois democrats based in Deobandh near Delhi active among the Moslem community of North India. However the religious overtones of this movement also complicated close co-operation between the centre at Deobandh and other socio-political national organisations.

From the 1870s onward the fanning of conflict between the Hindus and the Moslems became a constant feature of Britain's divide-and-rule policy. In the 1890s the British succeeded in provoking large-scale killings in the two communities in Bombay.

In 1897, when anti-British feeling was running high, in Maharashtra the followers of Tilak, the Chapekar brothers, assassinated a British official by the name of Rund. Tilak was arrested and sent to prison.

At the end of the nineteenth century India presented a complex political picture. A new stage of the national liberation struggle was beginning.



## INDIA IN THE PERIOD OF PRE-WAR IMPERIALISM, AS ASIA AWAKENS (1897-1917)

### MOUNTING CONTRADICTIONS BETWEEN BRITAIN AND INDIA

At the beginning of the twentieth century the trends that had started to emerge in the second half of the nineteenth century became more marked in both the economic and social life of India. The inner content of this process was the development of capitalism that had given rise to acute contradictions between the various classes and peoples of the subcontinent.

### Intensification of Colonial Exploitation

At the turn of the century the forms and methods of colonial plunder, intrinsic to the age of imperialism, assumed heightened importance.

In the years 1893-1899 the colonial authorities implemented a financial reform which reinforced India's position as a source of agricultural produce and raw materials for the colonial power and facilitated the penetration of British capital in the country. The mints in India which had produced silver rupees were closed down and the former silver standard was replaced by a new gold standard of the rupee. Its exchange rate was raised and was made dependent on the British pound sterling. These measures served to promote commodity circulation between India and Britain, while at the same time adding to the difference between prices in India for imported goods and those for export. At the same time the new arrangements complicated India's relations with other Asian countries whose silver currency had depreciated. Those who benefited from the measures were the British exporters owing to trade and non-equivalent exchange. The immediate result of the reform was the impoverishment of a number of Indian trading houses, a rise in prices and, most important of all, a considerable depreciation of silver jewellery—the main form of savings of the masses—which meant a new blow to the working people.

The financial reform that consolidated the position enjoyed by British exporters on the Indian market helped to turn the country into a source of agricultural produce and raw materials for Britain to an even greater degree than before. The non-equivalent exchange in trade relations between India and Britain, and other capitalist

countries, led to the export of untold material values, which were paid for at prices far lower than their real worth or indeed not paid for at all. The following figures serve to illustrate this: in 1901 exports exceeded imports by eleven million pounds sterling, but in 1909/10-1913/14 the average figure was 22.5 million.

At the same time more and more importance was being attached to the exploitation of India as a sphere of investment for British capital. British investments as before were being concentrated in construction projects, the railways and communications, irrigation, plantations, mining, and the textile and food industries. Considerable capital was also going into banking and insurance.

British finance capital was penetrating above all those spheres of the Indian economy which were directly linked with the exploitation of the country and whose development did not involve any serious competition for British goods on the Indian market.

British monopolies had control over the vast majority of tea plantations in Bengal, Assam and the south of the country, coffee plantations in Mysore and rubber plantations in Travancore, all jute factories in Calcutta, most workshops for mechanical repairs, a large number of the textile factories in Bombay and other provinces, almost all the railway workshops and mines in the country. The British also owned the largest industrial enterprises in the country. In 1915 all the workers in the jute industry and the ports, almost all those in the railway and tram workshops, half the workers in the sugar and wool industries, close on 80 per cent of the workers in the paper industry and about 60 per cent of those in the construction and metal-working industries were employed at factories belonging to British capitalists.

British capital investments in India over the period 1896-1910 grew from 4.5 to 6.7 thousand million rupees. The hold of British finance capital over the country's economy is vividly illustrated by the following figures: in 1905 the capital of 165 companies registered in Britain but operating in India was three times that of the companies (both British and Indian) registered in India itself.

However, the position of the British monopolies in the Indian economy was determined not merely by direct British capital investment in various branches of that economy. The British bourgeoisie also used economic levers it had itself created, in order to maintain the hold on the commanding heights which it had seized.

As before the main economic lever which enabled Britain to maintain her economic and political domination of India was the colonial state apparatus. Bonds and securities issued by the colonial state accounted for more than half of all British capital investment in India. As before the peoples of India had to bear the cost of colonial military ventures entered into by the British imperialists in Asia and Africa: the suppression of the Boxer Rebellion in China, the military expedition to Tibet, the Boer War, etc. During the period 1900-1913



India's sterling debt rose from 133 million to 177 million pounds sterling.

The importance of the managing agencies—organisations set up by the British colonial monopolies in India—was also on the increase. Both the old managing agencies and the new ones (affiliated enterprises of large British monopolies), were closely linked to British finance capital, to the leading British colonial banks. They worked in close collaboration with the upper echelons of the colonial administration in India, with the British financial oligarchy and the bureaucracy. The well-known Indian economist P. Lokanathan wittily compared the managing agencies to a kind of a bottle-neck through which British capital flowed into India, and then distributed itself amongst the various enterprises founded by those very agencies. The agencies which received assignments from the profits made by affiliated enterprises, had control over the bulk of the capital, both British and Indian, that was circulating in India.

As colonial exploitation in India intensified, the role of the British colonial banks became more important—these constituted another important economic lever manipulated by the City of London. The Mercantile Bank, the Chartered Bank of India and others controlled the country's foreign trade and financed the leading British wholesalers engaged in the export-import business. Through the medium of Indian trading and usury intermediary capital these banks maintained links with the villages—the producers of raw materials and consumers of British industrial mass consumption goods. At the same time there was virtually no organised industrial credit available in the country and Indian entrepreneurs were obliged to turn either to managing agencies or to big money-lenders, who were in control of the country's internal trade, and on whom the craftsmen and small-scale manufacturers were dependent.

The continuing development of commodity-money relations in the country, and the emergence of an internal market in a society, where feudal and imperialist relations held sway, paved the way to an enormous growth in the importance of trading and usury capital, which figured first and foremost as an agent of the foreign monopolies. At the beginning of the first decade of the twentieth century the annual income obtained by money-lenders came to approximately two hundred million rupees.

In the country's main economic centres a powerful comprador bourgeoisie took shape which provided for the British export-import transactions in India.

### **The Consolidation of the National Bourgeoisie**

At the same time more and more of the capital accumulated by the Indian propertied classes through commerce and money-lending found its way into industrial investment. Despite the British policy

designed to hold back Indian entrepreneurs, capitalist patterns in the Indian economy continued to take ever firmer root. In the period 1900-1914 the number of registered joint-stock companies rose from 1,360 to 2,552 and their paid-up capital rose from 362 million to 721 million rupees. As before, the cotton industry was the main field of activity by Indian factory-owners. Indian capital was starting to penetrate the plantations and mines; the vast majority of cotton-ginning mills, wheat and rice mills, oil-mills and printing works were also in Indian hands.

Most of these enterprises owned by Indians were of a small or medium size, and eighty per cent of them were not mechanised. Apart from the large industrial enterprises of the modern type the number of manufactories was also on the increase. The simplest forms of capitalist enterprise were the most common in the production of textiles and leather goods, tin utensils and other household articles, and also for the initial processing of agricultural raw materials. The largest numbers of workers were those employed in cottage industries and agriculture—their numbers ran into tens of millions.

The young national bourgeoisie in its efforts to consolidate its position in the country's economy, now made attempts to set up Indian-owned enterprises in the field of heavy industry. In 1911 an Indian capitalist by the name of Tata built in Jamshedpur (Bihar) the first Indian-owned metallurgical works, supported in this venture by powerful circles of the Indian bourgeoisie. In 1915 the Tata firm opened a hydroelectric power station also.

Since an important condition for the successful development of national enterprise was the creation of a system for capitalist credit, the Indian bourgeoisie began to set up its own banks. By the turn of the century several large Indian joint-stock banks had been opened. In 1913 there were 18 such banks; there also existed 23 medium banks belonging to Indian capitalists. However during this period Indian banking capital was used mainly in the sphere of domestic trade.

The development of Indian capitalist enterprise and the intensification of India's exploitation at the hands of the British imperialists served to exacerbate the contradictions between the emergent Indian bourgeoisie and the foreign monopolies.

The clash of interests between the two groups was most blatant on the Indian textile market. The appearance of cheap Japanese fabrics after the end of the nineteenth century in the markets of the Far East and South-East Asia accelerated the switch-over in Indian textile factories to the production mainly of cotton fabrics for the home market instead of yarn for export. One of the methods used to keep pace with foreign competition was to increase the output of hand-made fabrics. By the beginning of the twentieth century there existed close interdependence between the cotton mills and the hand-loom weavers, who numbered over ten million at that time. In 1897-1901 textile mills annually used cotton yarn worth an average of 85 million pounds and hand-loom weavers (individual craftsmen



and those employed in manufactories) yarn worth a total of 200 million.

Between 1886 and 1905 the number of mills producing cotton cloth, the vast majority of which belonged to Indians, increased from 95 to 197. Over the same period the number of spindles doubled and the number of looms tripled. British industrialists increased their imports of cotton fabrics into India. Making use of the colonial organs of power they placed a 3.5 per cent excise-duty on Indian textiles; yet the share of the textile market secured by imported fabrics dropped from 63 per cent to 57 per cent between 1901 and 1906, while the share of Indian fabrics produced in mills and by hand grew from 12 per cent to 15 per cent and from 25 per cent to 28 per cent respectively over the same period.

At this stage Indian craftsmen had not yet felt the real thrust of competition from the Indian mills. However, from this point on, the fabrics produced at local factories began to hold their own not only in competition with British goods, but also in competition with the work of local craftsmen. Between 1901 and 1911 close on half a million hand-loom weavers were ruined or lost their livelihood. Between 1907 and 1914 the production level for hand-woven fabrics hardly changed, while the output of cotton fabrics from the mills tripled. However the main threat to Indian mill-owners and hand-loom weavers still remained Lancashire.

In general this period was marked by an increase in the contradictions between British imperialists and the Indian national bourgeoisie. At the same time the close contacts, particularly with British finance capital, were maintained by the upper strata of the Indian bourgeoisie on account of credit arrangements, deliveries of equipment, etc. Still closer ties bound this section of the bourgeoisie to the exploiting strata of feudal society. The Indian factory-owners, who for the most part had been big traders and money-lenders, continued to secure part of their income through trading and money-lending operations. The industrialists also came into close contact with traders and money-lenders through the medium of the Indian joint-stock commercial banks which had come into existence by this time.

There was also a growing-together of capital (particularly trading and usury capital) with feudal landownership. The acquisition of land by traders, money-lenders and small-scale industrialists assumed such proportions, that in 1900 the colonial authorities were obliged to promulgate a law which placed restrictions on the transfer of land in the Punjab from peasants to non-agriculturist classes. Meanwhile many powerful *zamindars* and even some princes were buying shares in industrial companies and banking concerns. The economic links between the Indian national bourgeoisie and the British imperialists, and in particular between the former and the feudal lords, left its mark on the national bourgeoisie's political programme and its role in the national liberation movement.

### The Deteriorating Position of the Working People. The Growth of Class and Ethnic Contradictions

Despite the advance of capitalism, at the turn of the century India was still a backward agrarian country, where the feudal patterns of the past continued to hold sway. Although the industrial proletariat was growing in number, as countless craftsmen were being ruined and stranded without work, the proportion of the population engaged in agriculture grew from 66 per cent to 72 per cent between 1901 and 1911. The peasants, as before, were exposed to threefold exploitation—from the British imperialists, from the landlords and from trading and usury capital. The accelerated concentration of landed property in *rayatwari* areas and the increasing amount of land being rented out to Indian small share-croppers pointed to the fact that more and more of the poor peasants were losing their land which was being concentrated in the hands of the landlords and rich peasants.

Meanwhile due to the rising prices for agricultural produce the position of the more prosperous strata of the peasantry was improving. As commercial farming became more widespread and capitalists became more firmly established in the towns, new bourgeois relations began to take shape in the Indian village. Regular migration to the towns or the plantations and to the areas, where intensive agriculture was the order of the day, was part of the proletarianisation of the impoverished peasants now under way. Growing agrarian over-population meant that there was a ready labour supply, which in its turn led to the utilisation of more hired labour in the farms of the prosperous peasants and some landlords. However capitalist relations in the villages were still at an embryonic stage. At this juncture it was the town that was the knot of class and national contradictions (between the people of India and the British imperialists). While, during the second half of the nineteenth century, most incidents of popular protest had been in the outlying areas, once the imperialist era had set in centres of revolutionary struggle began to grow up mainly in the towns.

By this time a good number of factories were staffed by experienced workers with long years of service behind them. The numbers and concentration of workers were growing in the major industrial centres—Calcutta, Bombay, Madras, Ahmadabad and certain others. However the material position of the workers had in the meantime not improved. As before, they were exploited by both local and foreign capitalists, by money-lenders and various kinds of middlemen. The working day in most factories lasted between twelve and fourteen hours. The Indian bourgeoisie in its competition with the British monopolies tried to cut down production costs by reducing wages. This meant that the economic struggle of the working class which grew more intense in the early years of the twentieth century inevitably came to acquire an anti-imperialist character too.



Apart from the industrial proletariat then coming into being, the major force in the national liberation movement in the towns was that constituted by the artisans, workers and owners of manufactories, by petty traders. Precisely these strata of urban society experienced the dire consequences of India's transformation into a market for the sale of British goods, constantly coming up against the bureaucratic machine of the British colonial administration.

The petty-bourgeois intelligentsia was still the main propagator of the anti-imperialist struggle: it maintained close contact with the petty-bourgeois strata of the urban population and the ruined small-scale landowners and eked out a very meagre existence. The Indian intelligentsia, consisting in the main of representatives of the free professions, teachers and petty-officials, was not only obliged to wage a tough struggle for its day-to-day existence, but was also faced with the problem of growing unemployment. The development of capitalism, which in colonial conditions was a slow and ugly process, placed limitations on employment opportunities for graduates from Indian colleges and universities. The Indian student body, which numbered close on a million, constituted one of the most revolutionary elements in Indian society.

In its day-to-day activity the Indian intelligentsia was constantly faced with racial discrimination and slights of its national dignity. For the vast mass of Indians only the lowest posts in the colonial apparatus were accessible. It is revealing to note that the eight thousand British employed in the Indian Civil Service received a total salary of fourteen million pounds, whereas the 130,000 Indians got only a total of three million.

Thus, the development of capitalism in India served to awaken the national consciousness of various classes and social groups in Indian society. Their revolutionary spirit was also fanned by deterioration of the material position experienced by the masses after the dawn of the imperialist era, and by the intensification of capitalist exploitation and that exercised by feudal lords, traders and money-lenders.

While large increases in food prices were introduced, the wages of industrial and white-collar workers and other strata of the population remained almost the same. Years of drought or bad harvests were always followed by famine: in 1896-1897 areas with a population of 62 million were hit by famine, in 1899-1900 areas with a population of 28 million, in 1905-1906 with one of 3,300,000, in 1906-1907 with one of 13,000,000, in 1907-1908 with one of 49,600,000. Hand in hand with these famines went epidemics of cholera and the plague. Between 1896 and 1908 over six million people died of the plague. The per capita gross national income dropped steeply. There was an intensive process of absolute impoverishment underway.

The British colonialists also added to the discontent and fanned the flames of the national liberation movement in India through their internal policies for the country.

### **The Internal Policy of the Colonial Regime and the Revolutionary Movement at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century**

In 1899 Lord Curzon was appointed Viceroy of India (1899-1905); he represented the extreme reactionaries or Jingoists among the British imperialists. Curzon pursued a policy aimed at the all-out suppression of the national movement and one of undisguised racial discrimination. Curzon's administration gave active support to British entrepreneurs and openly obstructed the work of Indian industrialists. In 1903 a special law was introduced designed to facilitate in all possible ways the efforts of the British monopolies to prospect and utilise India's natural wealth.

Curzon nursed a particular hatred for the Indian intelligentsia. He reduced the taxable minimum from five hundred to one hundred rupees a year. This measure dealt a serious blow to wide sections of the so-called urban middle classes.

In 1898 and then again in 1904 the scope of the state secret law directed against the Indian national press was enlarged.

One of the first acts introduced by the new Viceroy was to cut down the membership of the Calcutta municipal council so as to reduce the representation of the propertied Indian classes within it. In 1904 Curzon put through a reform of the universities. Tuition fees were raised drastically and all the work of the universities was placed under the control of the British colonial bureaucracy. The colonial authorities were hoping through this measure to bar many of the Indian middle classes from access to higher education.

In respect of his attitude to the National Congress Curzon stated that he intended to help it along to a peaceful death. He made no secret of his contempt for Indian culture. In one of his speeches at the Calcutta University he openly mocked the country's great cultural heritage.

While pursuing this reactionary internal policy, Curzon was actively preparing for new military adventures in Asia. He hastened to reorganise the army and the police force. General Kitchener, the suppressor of the Boers, was appointed Commander-in-Chief. Sums allocated for military expenditure were greatly increased. New railways of strategic importance were built to give the army access to the North-West frontier. So that the British might assume firmer control of that region and also assume the offensive against the uninterrupted struggle waged by the Pathan tribes, the border regions were set apart in a special North-West Frontier province.

However Curzon's repressive policies merely served to strengthen the anti-colonialist attitudes and add to the revolutionary ferment.

When Tilak was released from prison in 1898 he again took up the



editorship of *Kesari*. The left wing of the national movement in Maharashtra now became more active. The police was unable to enforce a total ban on the semi-legal sports and youth societies, in which the national-minded sections of the Maratha youth were preparing themselves for active struggle against the colonial oppressors in days to come. The influence of Tilak, who had become the universally acknowledged leader of the left wing of the national movement, now spread far beyond the confines of the Bombay province. Contacts between the Maratha patriots and the Bengali nationalists were particularly close.

In Bengal, as in Maharashtra, various semi-legal organisations and associations of left nationalists sprang up at the turn of the century. Their members were highly critical of the moderate opposition voiced by the leaders of the National Congress and they agitated in favour of overthrowing the British colonial regime in India.

The mass festivals held to honour the god Ganesha in Bengal (following the Maharashtra model) developed into large-scale patriotic demonstrations symbolising the solidarity of the peoples of India in the national liberation movement. In 1902 a secret society was set up in Calcutta whose avowed aim was to prepare an armed uprising.

The local organisations of the National Congress were becoming more active as well: provincial conferences were held at which the voices of the left petty-bourgeois nationalists were to be heard more and more. Other leaders of the left nationalists started to win fame on a par with that of Tilak: Bepin Chandra Pal and Aurobindo Ghosh in Bengal, and Lala Lajpat Rai in the Punjab. By this time the left nationalists, as distinguished from the moderates, had come to be referred to as "extremists".

### **The Partition of Bengal in 1905 and the Beginnings of the Mass Movement**

In an attempt to forestall a possible outbreak of revolution, the British colonial authorities decided to deal a pre-emptive blow at the national-patriotic forces. It was to this end that Viceroy Curzon decided to partition Bengal in 1905.

At the beginning of the twentieth century Bengal was still the main centre of the national liberation movement. The Bengalis possessed a most formed national identity among the Indian peoples and their national unity was an important contributing factor for the development of the national liberation movement in that part of the country. The partition of Bengal into West Bengal (incorporating Bihar and Orissa) and East Bengal (incorporating Assam) served to exacerbate religious and national differences. It was indeed the case that the majority of the population in West Bengal consisted of Biharis and Oriyas, while in East Bengal, despite the predomination of Bengalis, the bulk of the population was Moslem. It was made quite clear to

representatives of the East Bengal Moslem landlords and the powerful Moslem bourgeoisie engaged in commerce that the Moslem intelligentsia would come to occupy more important posts in the colonial administration of the newly created province than would the Hindus.

However contrary to the plans of the colonialists the partition of Bengal served to stir up all strata of Bengali society. The national bourgeoisie engaged in industry and commerce feared lest the partition of Bengal disrupt the economic network that had become established and undermine the influence of the main body representing their interests, namely the Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The *zamindar* landlords were fearful lest partition be followed by the abolition of the system of permanent settlement and the land taxes raised. The intelligentsia was convinced that partition would be followed by a reduction in the administrative and legal institutions in Calcutta, moves that would make unemployment among the people with higher education still worse. Supporting this opinion Surendranath Banerjea, leader of the moderate nationalists in Bengal, wrote that the Bengalis realised that they were being insulted, humiliated, and that their whole future was at stake. Partition in his opinion had been a carefully calculated blow dealt at the growing solidarity and sense of identity of the Bengali-speaking population.

The partition of Bengal was welcomed only by small groups among the landowners, the comprador bourgeoisie and a section of the Moslem feudal intelligentsia. Partition was officially announced by the colonial authorities in July 1905 and at the beginning of August mass protest meetings were held in Calcutta. At one of these it was decided to start boycotting British goods. At the same time appeals were made for the people to encourage local Indian industry and buy indigenous goods (*Swadeshi*) in the nationalist press, at mass meetings and at meetings of national political organisations.

The *Swadeshi* movement, although outwardly economic in character, soon became a mass movement embracing the whole nation. In the autumn of 1905 it spread beyond the confines of Bengal to other regions of the country, in particular Maharashtra and the Punjab. This movement was actively supported by Tilak and his followers. Stalls and industrial enterprises of the *Swadeshis* were opened everywhere and shops trading in foreign goods were picketed.

October 16, 1905, when the partition of Bengal came into force, was declared a day of national mourning throughout the former province. In Calcutta an enormous demonstration was held in the course of which a huge procession made its way to the banks of the Ganges (regarded as a holy river by the Hindus) singing the national hymn "Bande Mataram" to make a solemn vow to campaign for the reunification of their motherland. Business activities came to a standstill in the city, no fires were lit, no food was prepared. As a token of their solemn vow, the Bengalis tied a strip of cloth round their wrists—a symbol of unity of the Bengali people.



The Swadeshi movement grew and spread to the rural areas as well as the towns. Those who went against the boycott were made social outcasts. Many traders and compradors were ruined as a result. In Calcutta and other towns of Bengal organisations of local volunteers were set up drawn mainly from the secret societies and young people's sports organisations. The volunteers who wore a special uniform (yellow turbans and red shirts) were the main organisers of mass demonstrations and rallies, and it was they who were mainly responsible for the picketing of British trading establishments.

The Swadeshi movement also came to influence the leadership of the National Congress. At the end of 1905 at one of the Congress sessions, Gokhale, a prominent leader of the moderate nationalists and president of the Congress, voiced his support for the boycott of British goods in Bengal as a form of protest against partition. However the moderates did not support the suggestion made by Tilak and the extremists that the Swadeshi movement be broadened so as to embrace all provinces of India and that the boycott be applied to all spheres of public life in India.

This session showed that the moderate Congress leaders were unable to continue ignoring the mass movement; however at the same time their efforts to narrow down the scope of the struggle in every way possible pointed to serious differences between them and the extremists. These differences within the national movement became still more marked as the revolutionary struggle gathered momentum.

#### **The Growth of the Swadeshi Movement and Mass Involvement**

From early 1906 onwards the Swadeshi movement continued to spread to towns and villages in Bengal and other parts of the country, leading to countless mass protests against the imperialists.

The extremists in Bengal, Maharashtra, the Punjab and also other provinces began to intensify their activity. An illegal revolutionary organisation called *Anusilan Samiti* (Society of Progress) was set up in Dacca, which served to co-ordinate the efforts of the underground workers and revolutionaries. Similar societies appeared in the Bombay province and the Punjab. Secret societies were carrying out propaganda work among the petty-bourgeois strata of the urban population, particularly among high-school pupils and students.

New publications of left political sympathies also began to appear. Of these particular popularity was enjoyed by the Bengali newspapers *Yugantar* (New Times) and *Bande Mataram*. Pamphlets on the popular uprising of 1857-1859, Garibaldi, Mazzini and the Russian revolution were also being printed and distributed.

So as to have legal cover for their underground activities, the extremists used the sports societies and youth clubs that had been set up throughout the country, as also the Swadeshi stalls and trading

establishments. Through the Swadeshi movement the Indian petty-bourgeois nationalists sought to involve the broad masses in an active anti-imperialist movement. They did not confine their activities to the urban petty bourgeoisie but also carried out propaganda work among the workers and even the rural population.

Mass meetings and demonstrations, which for the most part involved the petty-bourgeois strata of the urban population, were supported by the working class. As early as the autumn of 1905 several large-scale strikes were organised at the Bombay cotton mills as a result of which the workers achieved some reduction in the length of the working day. In 1906 Bengal became the centre of the strike movement.

In the summer two major strikes on the East India Railways broke out. In Calcutta workers and white-collar staff at the state printing works came out on strike together with employees of the municipal council; in the middle and latter part of 1906 some large-scale strikes took place at British-owned textile mills there.

The strike movement of the summer and autumn of 1906 was a landmark insofar as the workers on this occasion started to put forward not only purely economic demands but also a number of political ones; in particular they started protesting against the racial discrimination practised by the British administration. In the course of the strikes of the railway and textile workers local trade unions were set up with the help of Bengali petty-bourgeois democrats. This drawing together of the general democratic anti-imperialist movement and the struggle of the working class marked a new advance in the national liberation movement.

The extremists (particularly in Bengal and in the Punjab) also started to agitate among the peasants. Meetings and rallies in support of the boycott against British goods were held more and more often in the villages. The extremists distributed revolutionary pamphlets among the peasants. One of these read: "How can we accept as our rulers these thieves, who have destroyed our crafts, robbed our weavers and metalsmiths of their work? They import endless quantities of goods produced in their country and sell them through our people at our bazaars thus robbing us of our wealth, and our people of their livelihood! How can we accept as our rulers men who plunder the crops from our fields and condemn us to hunger, fever and plague? How can we accept as our rulers these foreigners who burden us with more and more new taxes?... Brothers, the longer you bear this the more these crafty people will oppress you. We must take a bold stand and look for a means of deliverance. Brothers, we are the salt of the earth. It is with our money that they grow fat without working. They drink our blood. Why should we tolerate this?! Brother Hindus, vow in the name of Kali, Durga, Mahadeva and Shri Krishna, brother Moslems, vow in the name of Allah and declare it in every village that Hindus and Moslems will stand together to serve their Homeland.... Rise up, brothers! Prove yourselves to be worthy sons



of the Motherland, fight bravely and be ready to make sacrifices for Mother Bengal!"

This appeal for unity of Hindus and Moslems was no chance phenomenon. Apart from direct suppression of popular protest—bans on meetings and demonstrations, on singing of the hymn "Bande Mataram", dispersals of meetings, etc.—the British colonial authorities staked everything on their efforts to split the movement by fanning religious enmity between the Hindu and Moslem communities. However in 1905-1906 they did not succeed in provoking serious clashes between the two communities. In that situation of mounting revolutionary ferment the support of the pro-British Moslems from among the powerful feudal lords and comprador bourgeoisie was hastily mobilised.

In the autumn of 1906 arrangements were made for a delegation of "leading Moslems" to visit the new Viceroy, Lord Minto (1906-1910). In the memorandum submitted to him by the delegation it was requested that a special electorate for Moslems be reserved in municipal and legislative councils. The claims put forward by the powerful Moslem feudal lords met with a favourable response from the British colonial bureaucracy. It was announced that the Moslems in East Bengal would be assured of special privileges should vacancies come up in the administrative service.

In December of that year a reactionary pro-British organisation was set up in Dacca called the Muslim League, which was designed to foster a spirit of loyalty to the British authorities among India's Moslems.

That same year the reactionary group of the Hindu community set up with the authorities' support a religious organisation known as *Shri Bharat Dharma Mandal* (The Society of the Famous Religion of India).

However during the early stages of the movement's development the British did not succeed in making capital out of the differences between the various groups of Indian nationalists. The moderates, although with reservations, continued to support the Swadeshi movement, and this provided impetus for the development of Indian-owned capitalist enterprises. It was precisely during this campaign in support of Indian-owned industry that the Tata steel mills distributed shares among its seven thousand shareholders. The leading section of the Indian bourgeoisie was now reaping the fruits of the boycott against British manufactured goods. It is revealing to note that between 1905 and 1907 prices for Indian fabrics went up by eight per cent, while the prices for British fabrics fell by 25 per cent.

The extremists had so far not contemplated an open split with the moderates. In the autumn of 1906 the extremists proposed Tilak as their candidate for president at a session of the National Congress in Calcutta. However the moderates, in order to avoid his being elected, secured the post for the veteran politician, Dadabhai Naoroji, who enjoyed universal respect among the Indian nationalists.

At the Calcutta session, under pressure from the extremists, for the first time ever the national liberation movement put forward a demand for *Swaraj* (Self-Rule) which was interpreted then as self-government within the framework of the British Empire, along the lines of the status enjoyed by the self-governing British colonies.

That session of the National Congress showed how deep had been the impact of the first Russian revolution on the national liberation movement in India. The President, Dadabhai Naoroji stated that if the Russian peasants were not only prepared for self-government but also succeeded in wresting that right from the grasp of the most powerful autocracy on earth, if China in the east of Asia and Persia in the west were stirring, if Japan had already awakened, if Russia was fighting heroically for its liberation, how could they, allegedly free citizens of the Indo-British Empire, remain the subjects of despotic rule robbed of all rights?

### **The Impact of the First Russian Revolution (1905) on National Movements. The Second Stage of the Struggle: *Swaraj***

The first Russian revolution was to influence the activities of the extremists most of all. News of revolutionary developments in Russia reached India mainly via the European bourgeois press, which usually concentrated on acts of individual terror referring to these as "Russian methods". However secretly printed brochures describing the revolutionary events also made their way to India. The petty-bourgeois democrats there and the members of secret societies who interpreted the Russian revolution from their own point of view started teaching patriotically inclined youths how to use firearms.

The activities of Indian revolutionaries who had emigrated to Europe also served to spread Russia's revolutionary experience. In the period of 1905-1907 a circle of Indian revolutionaries in exile was set up first in London and then in Paris. These émigrés established close contacts with the Russian Social-Democrats who imparted to the Indians their revolutionary experience. At the Stuttgart Congress of the Second International Indian delegates delivered passionate speeches against colonialism and British imperialism. They spoke of Indian patriots' admiration for the heroic example of the Russian revolution.

The echoes of the revolutionary storm in Russia which reached India intensified the revolutionary ferment in the country. The Calcutta session of the National Congress marked the end of the first stage of the struggle as it were. After 1907 the Swadeshi movement began to develop into a movement campaigning for *Swaraj* (Self-Rule).



The activity of this mass movement reached its zenith in the Punjab in the spring of 1907. Wide strata of the urban population, including the workers, took part in the mass meetings, demonstrations and strikes directed against the British. Petty-bourgeois democrats led by Lala Lajpat Rai and Ajit Singh made contact with the soldiers of the Sepoy units who began to take part in the mass meetings. When Rai and Singh were arrested and sent into exile this sparked off an uprising in the town of Rawalpindi which was put down by British units. In the Punjab demonstrations in the towns were supported by the local peasants. The movement began to assume a truly national character.

The struggle also became more intense in Bengal where a new secret society called Bande Mataram Samprodai (Bande Mataram Association) was set up. It began to prepare for armed action. With increasing frequency the national volunteers began cordoning off bazaars and destroying goods of British origin. Demonstrations and meetings often ended in skirmishes with the police. During one such clash a group of policemen in Calcutta went over to the side of the demonstrators.

In various urban centres strikes were starting up again. As in the previous year 1906, the railway-workers were in the vanguard. In the spring the railway-workers of Bombay went on strike and in October there was a ten-day general strike involving both workers and white-collar staff of the East India Railways. The economic life of Bengal was paralysed: the shortage of coal brought factories to a standstill in Calcutta and other towns, the stations were blocked with large numbers of unloaded freight trains. Yet most important of all was that the Viceroy found himself cut off from the whole of the rest of the country. This seriously undermined the prestige of the colonial regime in a country caught up in revolutionary ferment. Strikes continued in various places up until the end of the year. As before the extremists played an active part in their organisation.

#### **Deepening Conflict Between Nationalists. Split in the National Congress**

As the revolutionary struggle gathered momentum the differences between the moderates and the extremists grew more and more serious. The moderates, who represented the powerful Indian bourgeoisie, the upper strata of the bourgeois intelligentsia and those landlords who supported the national movement, did not demand more than the implementation of a protectionist policy, certain restrictions on foreign capital and extension of self-government via more extensive representation of India's propertied classes in the legislative councils under the Viceroy and the provincial governors. They demanded that these councils be granted rights to control, in some matters, the activity of the colonial administration.

The extremists stood for India's complete independence, although most of them were not in favour of an armed uprising: they held that independence could not be achieved without the active participation of the masses in the national liberation movement. They assumed that at some future date a federal republic would be set up in India and the various principalities abolished. Although the extremists did not have a clear-cut programme for the resolution of India's internal social problems, their appeal to the masses objectively encouraged the workers and peasants to enter into the class struggle. The weakness of the extremists' stand lay in the fact that they did not have a nation-wide organisation of their own and were working only within the provincial organisations of the National Congress.

This unleashing of the masses' revolutionary initiative and the spread of the strike movement alarmed the upper echelons of the Indian bourgeoisie and the moderates. In speeches made by powerful Bombay factory-owners and also by the leaders of the moderates such as Gokhale and Banerjea calls for compromise with the colonial authorities came more and more to the fore.

In order to accelerate the retreat of the right wing of the nationalists, Viceroy Minto announced that work had started on administrative reform. The colonial authorities assured the *zamindars* of Bengal that their rights would remain intact.

In the spring of 1907 a delegation of Bengali moderates, led by Banerjea, called on the Viceroy. Its members requested assistance in bridling "the passions run wild in Bengal". The moderates started to come forward with professions of loyalty in the other provinces as well. In the summer of that year the *zamindars* of Bengal issued a special manifesto directed against the development of any mass movement.

At the same time Tilak was making a number of tours through the country campaigning to consolidate the support for the extremists. His speeches were given wide coverage in the whole of the Indian press. His dismissal of the Indian constitution as a penal code was taken up by the whole nation.

A bitter struggle developed over nominations for the President at the next session of the National Congress, however once again the extremists were unable to secure the post for Tilak.

The majority of the delegates at this session, held in Surat (Bombay Province), belonged to the right wing. At the opening meeting Tilak accused the moderates of abandoning the campaign for *Swaraj* that had been approved at the last session. The meeting ended in a skirmish and the police was called in to intervene by the moderates. The next day both factions held separate meetings. In their speeches and the resolutions they adopted the moderates made it clear they were capitulating to the imperialists. The extremists made an attempt, albeit unsuccessful, to set up an organisation of their own, after which they made an appeal for further extension of the mass movement. The split in the Congress was now a fait accompli.



### Growth of the Mass Struggle. Political Strike in Bombay

After the capitulation of the moderates the mass movement in Bengal entered a period of decline and the activity of the secret societies was confined to individual acts of terror. The centre of the struggle now shifted to Maharashtra and South India.

In the spring of 1908 in the towns of Tinnevely and Tuticorin large-scale unrest broke out which developed into a general political strike led by the extremists' organisations in the area. This protest was cruelly suppressed by British troops.

In Maharashtra the extremists engaged in wide-scale organisational work to set up their centres in every *talook* of the Bombay Province. They intensified their work among the Bombay workers who organised several large-scale strikes. One of these—the telegraphists' strike—spread to other towns also.

Meanwhile the British unleashed a counter-offensive against the revolutionary forces. In Bengal the national volunteers' organisations were banned. Even the wearing of garments embroidered with national slogans was punished. In 1907 the Prevention of Seditious Meetings Act was passed. It facilitated the dispersal of political meetings and demonstrations. In 1908 the Newspapers (Incitement to Offences) Act was passed which entitled the authorities to close down any newspaper on the grounds that it "incited to revolt".

Lenin described the policy of the British colonial authorities and Morley, the Secretary of State for India, in the following terms: "The most Liberal and Radical personalities of free Britain, men like John Morley—that authority for Russian and non-Russian Cadets, that luminary of 'progressive' journalism (in reality, a lackey of capitalism)—become regular Genghis Khans when appointed to govern India, and are capable of sanctioning every means of 'pacifying' the population in their charge, even to the extent of flogging political protestors!"\*

In order to deal a final blow to the national liberation movement the colonial authorities arrested Tilak, making use of the 1908 Newspapers Act for this purpose. The arrest of Tilak and the trial which followed (July 13-22, 1908) led to mass demonstrations and protest meetings throughout the Bombay Province. Tilak's supporters started preparing for protest strikes in the Bombay factories.

Tilak turned the speech for his defence into a fiery condemnation of British imperialist policy in India. Tilak's speech had wide-scale repercussions within India and its fame spread beyond the country's borders.

Despite Indian public opinion Tilak was sentenced to a heavy fine and six years hard labour, that was later commuted to a prison sentence.

\* V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 15, p. 184.

After the sentence had been announced the extremists appealed to the people of Bombay to organise a six-day general strike in protest—one day for each of the years of hard labour to which Tilak had been sentenced.

On July 23 a general political strike began. Workers from all Bombay's factories went on strike, all shops were closed and educational establishments shut their doors. Patriotic slogans and portraits of Tilak sprang up everywhere. Those attending demonstrations and protest meetings met the police with a shower of stones. The colonial authorities were powerless to put down the strike which ended as scheduled after the six-day period.

In his assessment of the historic significance of these events in Bombay Lenin wrote: "The infamous sentence pronounced by the British jackals on the Indian democrat Tilak—he was sentenced to a long term of exile, the question in the British House of Commons the other day revealing that the Indian jurors had declared for acquittal and that the verdict had been passed by the vote of the British jurors!—this revenge against a democrat by the lackeys of the money-bag evoked street demonstrations and a strike in Bombay. In India, too, the proletariat has already developed to conscious political mass struggle—and, that being the case, the Russian-style British regime in India is doomed!"\*

The Bombay strike marked the climax of the revolutionary upsurge in the years 1905-1908. Broad sections of the urban petty bourgeoisie, the middle strata and the working class and also some groups among the peasants in Bengal and the Punjab had been drawn into the political struggle against the British colonialists. The active participation of the extremists in the revolutionary activity and their organisation of mass protest in various parts of India helped consolidate the petty-bourgeois, democratic wing within the national liberation movement. The influence of the first Russian revolution made itself felt most of all in the activities of the petty-bourgeois democrats. They welcomed this Russian experience of mass political agitation and general political strike and adopted it to suit the Indian scene. The advance of the ideology of the petty-bourgeois revolutionary democrats was reflected in the Indians' growing sense of national identity, which it raised to a new level. This stood out particularly clearly in the articles and speeches made by Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal, Aurobindo Ghosh and other extremist leaders.

However the events of 1905-1908 with their localised nature brought out the weakness of the national movement, which in its turn was the fruit of the historically determined level of economic and socio-political development the country had reached at that time. Two major problems in particular were the split in the ranks of the national

\* V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 15, p. 184.



forces and the lack of a nation-wide organisation of the petty-bourgeois democrats.

Although the events in the first decade of the twentieth century had made clear the opportunities for involving the masses in the national movement (the essential pre-condition for the success of the anti-imperialist struggle) the vast majority of the peasantry, which constituted the bulk of the Indian population, had not yet reached the level of social consciousness necessary before it could play its proper part in the political struggle.

The historic significance of this stage in the national liberation movement lay in the fact that it marked the beginning of the political awakening of those classes and strata of Indian society which constituted the basic motive force behind the anti-colonial struggle during the period of revolutionary advance that was to follow in the 1920s.

#### INDIA ON THE EVE OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR AND DURING THE WAR YEARS

##### The Morley-Minto Reforms

After the Bombay political strike there was a temporary recession in the mass movement and this must be put down in part to the internal policy of the Anglo-Indian authorities aimed at deepening the rift within the camp of the anti-colonial opposition. As before, the British administration was pursuing a carrot-and-stick policy.

On the one hand, active opponents of the colonial regime were subjected to cruel repression: laws passed in the years 1908-1913 (the Explosive Substances Act of 1908; Criminal Law—Amendment—Acts of 1908 and of 1913) directed against underground anti-British organisations were designed to provide the legal foundation for a policy of terror.

What had initially been a temporary law to prohibit assembly with mutinous intent (1907) was extended until 1911, when it was further extended for an indefinite period. In 1910 a new Indian Press Act was passed that gave the colonial authorities wider opportunities to harass the nationalist press. In the first few years after that act was passed hundreds of Indian publications were closed down, confiscated or subjected to heavy fines. A wave of police terror swept the country.

On the other hand, the British introduced various political measures to consolidate the position of the propertied classes in India whose support they enjoyed (princes, feudal landowners, compradors) and to win over to their side the leaders of the moderate wing of the national movement.

In 1909 a new Indian Council Act was introduced by Viceroy Minto and Morley, the Secretary of State for India, which came to be known as the Morley-Minto Reforms. According to the new law, which came

into force in 1910 the number of elected members in the Central (Imperial) Legislative Council under the Viceroy was increased and now constituted half of its total strength, while in the governors' legislative councils in the major provinces there was to be an elected majority. At the same time a system of curia representation was introduced: the general, landlord and Moslem, and the number of places reserved for Moslem representatives was increased. Furthermore while the landlords' and Moslem vote was direct, election of the others in the general list proceeded in two or three stages. As a result of these measures the feudal lords and the leaders of the Moslem community were accorded a privileged position in comparison with that of the Hindu bourgeoisie and the upper strata of the bourgeois intelligentsia; all this was in keeping with the divide-and-rule policy aimed at opposing the Hindu and Moslem communities.

The administrative reform of 1909 did not affect the interests of the vast majority of Indians: those entitled to vote constituted a mere one per cent of the population, while the work of the councils was, as before, of a consultative character.

Internal policies directed at broadening the social support for the colonial regime among the propertied classes were carried further by the new Viceroy, Lord Hardinge (1910-1916). In 1911 India was visited for the first time by the British monarch. George V was crowned Emperor of India at a lavishly staged function (*darbar*) in the palace of the Great Moghuls. During the coronation celebrations which were used to demonstrate the loyalty of the feudal-landowning class to the British Crown, the decision was announced to put an end to the highly unpopular partition of Bengal, while the provinces of Assam, Bihar and Orissa were set up as independent administrative units and the capital transferred from turbulent Calcutta to Delhi.

This last act was dictated both by internal considerations and by those connected with foreign policy. The signing of the Anglo-Russian Convention that demarcated spheres of influence in Asia, consolidated British influence in countries bordering on India, in particular in Tibet, where a British military expedition had been sent as early as 1904. Insofar as Anglo-Russian rivalry in Asia had now given way to confrontation between Britain and Imperial Germany in that part of the world, British politicians in India were now concentrating their attention on the Moslem East, where in the countries that formed part of the Ottoman empire, German agents were becoming extremely active. At the same time the British succeeded in consolidating their influence in Afghanistan. To represent the British monarch as the rightful and legitimate heir to the throne of the Great Moghuls meant (in the eyes of British politicians) a boost to the prestige of the colonial regime, both for the Moslem community in India and also for the Moslem peoples of the Middle East.

The cultural policy pursued by the colonial government at this time was also to a certain measure directed to that end.



## The Development of Indian Culture at the Turn of the Century

At the very end of the nineteenth century, in the times of Viceroy Lord Curzon, a number of medieval architectural masterpieces (for the most part examples of the so-called Indo-Moslem architecture) were restored. In addition to the run-of-the-mill paintings of European (mainly English) academic schools, Indian craft work, medieval miniatures and sculpture were put on display in the new museums set up at the beginning of the twentieth century (the Queen Victoria Museum in Calcutta, the Prince of Wales Museum in Bombay, etc.). Yet at the same time countless architectural monuments dating from ancient and medieval times were neglected and crumbling, and historical forts (such as the Red Fort in Delhi and forts in Allahabad, Ahmadnagar and other towns) were disfigured as they were adapted to provide barracks for the Anglo-Indian army.

The traditions of Indian national architecture, whose custodians had been the craftsmen from the professional castes of stone-masons, no longer given major orders either by the state or private individuals, were now gradually dying out. It was only in the dwelling-houses of the villages and the provincial towns that these traditions were preserved to the utmost. Public buildings such as railway stations and offices were still for the most part built in the pretentious style of the "Victorian era" which was an ugly combination of pseudo-Classicism and pseudo-Gothic with elements adapted from the ornament of Hindu or Moslem temples and palaces. A so-called neo-Indian style began to develop that was essentially an artificial imitation of Indian medieval architecture, particularly that found in the buildings of the Moghul era. A well-known example of this style is provided by the government buildings in New Delhi (1913-1931), the European part of the country's new capital.

The spread of this neo-Indian style in civic architecture was bound up with the policy of the colonial authorities designed to promote "imperial traditions". However the actual appearance of this style was stimulated by the newly awoken interest shown by progressive circles of the British and Indian intelligentsia at the turn of the century in the historical and cultural heritage of India's peoples. An important part in this promotion of interest in India's classical art was played by the art historians E. B. Havell from Britain, the director of the art school in Calcutta, and his Indian colleague, Ananda K. Coomaraswami, who devoted considerable effort to the study and revitalisation of Indian arts and crafts.

At the end of the nineteenth century a growth in European and local interest in certain types of craft articles helped to uphold the traditions of the Indian applied arts (stone carving, metal-work, wood-work, jewellery, ceramics, textiles, embroidery, etc.). Meanwhile certain foreign influences were making themselves felt in craft

articles, fashioned to a large extent with the European consumer in mind (Kashmir shawls, the wares of Delhi jewellers, etc.)

European and also oriental (Japanese and Chinese) techniques in painting and drawing were taken over by various Indian artists engaged in continuing and developing the traditions of classical Indian painting. The founder of this trend in Indian fine arts was Obonindranath Tagore (1871-1951), who worked in Calcutta and was a member of the famous Tagore family, which contributed so much to the cause of its country's enlightenment and which also produced the great Indian poet, Rabindranath Tagore. Most of the artists from this school were Bengalis, which explains why this movement in Indian art is known as the Bengali Renaissance. The works of Obonindranath Tagore, and also those of other artists such as Nandalal Boshu, A. K. Haldar, Samarendranath Gupta, S. Ch. Ukil laid the foundations for modern Indian painting and graphic arts.

It was in the development of new Indian literatures that the emergence of a new Indian culture, linked with the formation of a bourgeois society underway in colonial India, made itself felt most clearly of all. In the early decades of the twentieth century Indian writers completed the long and complicated process of assimilating the European prose genres—the novel, short story and essay. Traditional themes from India's past provided the subject matter for the majority of Indian prose works, as indeed for drama and poetry as well. Within the colonial context this preoccupation with the heroes of bygone battles and uprisings provided Indian writers with virtually their only possibility for fostering patriotic sentiments in their readers. This concentration on historical and heroic themes meant that the Indian literatures of modern times were long to remain mainly romantic in character.

It should however also be noted that apart from the historical novels of real literary merit, there appeared in India a large number of hack imitations in which the romantic treatment of mythological or historical themes degenerated into reactionary idealisation of the feudal past.

Yet it was at the beginning of the twentieth century that this romanticism finally began to give way to critical realism: the writers concerned adapted the heroic and romantic themes in such a way as to enhance the social motives of Indian prose. More and more attention was now being paid to problems that interested progressive sections of the educated Indian youth. In the work of leading Indian writers themes connected with social conflict came to the fore ever more distinctly.

New trends in literature were manifested most vividly in Bengal, whose literature continued to occupy a leading place among the new literatures of India. The leading figure of Bengali literature, who was to exert an enormous influence on the cultural life of his country during the first half of the twentieth century, was Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941)—the great Indian writer, musician and artist.



philosopher, teacher and public figure. Tagore's name went down in the history of Indian literature on account of his novels, stories, literary criticism, sketches, philosophical essays, poems and plays. As early as the 1880s and 1890s he had become famous as the author of collections of poetry, plays and various short stories, however it was in the twentieth century that he became well known as a thinker and novelist, after he published his novel *Gora* (1907-1910) and *The Home and the World* (1915-1916) devoted to the intellectual and spiritual dilemmas and ideals of the Bengali intelligentsia. The novel *The Home and the World* was particularly influential due to its introduction into Indian literature of the subject of the national movement; this work reflected Tagore's own attitude to the various currents within the national movement during the Swadeshi and Swaraj campaigns. Through his work, that received world-wide recognition, Tagore was able to secure the triumph of critical realism in Indian literature. In 1913 Tagore became the first Indian to be awarded the Nobel Prize for literature.

The second important writer of the school of realism from Bengal at this period was Shorotchondro Chottopadhyay (1876-1938) whose novels truthfully reflect the conditions of life in Bengal of this time.

In other Indian literatures of the modern period similar phenomena are to be found: the development of new genres and the rise of critical realism. In Maharashtra the pioneer of these trends was the father of modern Marathi prose, Hari Narayan Apte (1864-1919), whose ideas reflect to some extent the influence of Tilak. Historical themes were also treated by many novelists and playwrights writing in Hindi (Shrinivas Das, Kishori Lal Goswami et al.), Telugu (K. Srinivasa Rao, V. V. Sastri et al.) and other Indian languages. The father of modern Oriya literature was Fakirmohan Senapati (1847-1948), whose novel *Six Bighas, Eight Square Rods of Land* (1902) treated acute social problems of Indian rural life in his times.

Side by side with these new genres the traditional ones also continued to develop—mainly in poetry, but to some extent in drama as well. However even poetic writing was caught up in the wave of innovation; the content and underlying message of poetry was beginning to change. It was at this time that another outstanding Indian poet of modern times began to publish works in Urdu, Parsee and Punjabi—Muhammad Iqbal (1873-1938). Social themes and the idea of the Motherland came to occupy an important place in Iqbal's poetry at the very beginning of the twentieth century.

An important role in the emergence of these new literatures of the various peoples of India was that played by the journals of literary criticism and centres for the study of Indian languages and literature that were set up by leading national writers and other prominent figures. An example of these was the society set up in 1893 called Kashi Nagari Pracharini Sabha (Benares Society for the Propagation of Devanagari) for the study of history and promotion of Hindi

language and literature. Works by Mahavirprasad Dvivedi on Hindi literature, by M. H. Azad on Urdu literature and S. Iyer on Tamil literature are among those which laid the foundations of Indian literary criticism.

A modern living language with a colloquial flavour began to take shape in the works of these writers of the new trend. Some of them were to make their names as real reformers of the language: for example writers in Telugu—Kandukuri Viresalingam (1848-1919) and Guruzada Appa Rao (1861-1915).

The freedom movement directed against the colonial regime exerted a decisive influence on the content and commitment of modern and indeed traditional literature. This can to a large extent also be said of the popular theatrical art and the songs and dances of the time, which in a laconic almost Aesopian language in the mouths of figures from the Indian epics rallied the people to the struggle against the colonial regime. This commitment to freedom in popular art echoed the political and ideological principles of the activists in the anti-British underground organisations.

### The Work of the Underground Revolutionary Organisations

The semi-legal revolutionary organisations and secret societies, that had grown up in Maharashtra and Bengal at the turn of the century and had been active in the Swadeshi and Swaraj movements, had switched to tactics of political terror after the mass movement had gone into a decline. The main underground organisations in Bengal were Anusilan Samiti in Dacca and the Yugantar Party in Calcutta which had many branches in other towns and even in the villages. The tasks the revolutionary organisations set themselves were outlined in pamphlets and also in the Calcutta newspaper *Yugantar*: these were to foster in Indian youth a sense of national identity and a readiness to wage the struggle with whatever means available to achieve India's complete independence, and finally to prepare armed attacks and carry out acts of terrorism. A brochure entitled *Bartaman rananiti* (Rules of Modern Warfare) and published by an underground organisation contained the following words: "War is inevitable if oppression cannot be ended by any other means, if the leprosy of slavery poisons the blood in the body of our nation and robs it of its life force."

The adoption by Indian underground revolutionaries of political terror tactics can to a large extent be put down to the influence of certain revolutionary organisations in Europe, particularly Russia. In 1907 one of the leaders of the Yugantar Party, Hem Chandra Das, was sent to Western Europe, where he made contact with Russian revolutionaries in exile and received instruction in making explosives. After his return to India at the beginning of 1908 something of a "bomb cult" spread through the Indian revolutionary organisations.



Individual acts of terror were not an end in themselves for the Indian revolutionaries, for acts of terror were only perpetrated against those British or Indians who represented an immediate threat to the underground movement. The leaders of the underground organisations held that terrorist activity should provide a catalyst for revolutionary activity within Indian society. B. Ghosh, one of the leaders of the Bengali terrorists, wrote that he and his comrades did not count on liberating their country by killing a few British, but rather to demonstrate to the people how they should face danger and face death. Thus the significance that acts of terror assumed varied from one underground organisation to another. While for the militant group of the Yugantar Party—the Manektolia Garden Society, acts of terror constituted the bulk of their revolutionary activity, other groups like the Nav Bharat Society (New India Society) in Gwalior and Anusilan Samiti concentrated mainly on preparations for a future uprising.

Underground revolutionaries were also active in Maharashtra. The most influential of the societies founded there was Abhinav Bharat (New India), dating from 1907 and led by the Savarkar brothers—Vinayak and Ganesh. Other underground organisations linked with the central ones in Bengal or Maharashtra were also active in the Punjab, the United Provinces, the Central Provinces and in South India.

In 1908 the first terrorist acts were perpetrated in Bengal and Maharashtra. The colonial authorities wrought cruel vengeance against the underground revolutionaries: those directly involved in the assassinations were condemned to death and members of secret societies were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment or hard labour. The Manektolia Garden Society, Abhinav Bharat, and Anusilan Samiti were wiped out in 1908-1909, while the leaders of underground revolutionary organisations, including B. Ghosh, U. Dutt, Hem Chandra Das, U. N. Banerji, J. Banerji, P. B. Das, B. Ch. Nag and the Savarkar brothers, were thrown into prison. However these repressive measures did not bring the revolutionaries' activities to a standstill. New groups and societies sprang up in the place of those that had been wiped out. On the eve of the First World War a branch of the Anusilan Samiti, set up once again in 1909 in Benares (United Provinces), the New India Society in Maharashtra, the Raja Bazar Society in Calcutta, Barisal Samiti (Society for Barisal Town) in East Bengal, were all most active. Terrorist acts against the British continued, and also against Indians—such as police agents: a total of thirty-two such acts were recorded for the period 1909-1914. In 1912 an attempt was made to assassinate Viceroy Hardinge, who was seriously wounded in a bomb explosion.

When the national movement had first been gathering momentum in 1905-1906 the underground revolutionaries had concentrated on spreading propaganda in the units of the Anglo-Indian army, for they regarded the soldiers and Indian non-commissioned officers as an

important potential force for their cause in any future uprising. In 1909 an unsuccessful attempt was made to arouse the soldiers of the Punjabi regiment stationed in Calcutta to rebellion. More careful preparations were made for a revolt planned to start in February 1915 simultaneously in five different garrisons in North India, including one in the main town of the Punjab—Lahore. However an agent provocateur betrayed the plans and those involved in the plot were arrested, and the organisers led by Rash Behari Bose were routed.

The setbacks experienced by the petty-bourgeois national-revolutionaries can be attributed first and foremost to their weak ties with the popular masses, and also to their lack of any economic or social programme. These isolated and far from numerous underground organisations, which did not have adequate material resources and were subjected to cruel police repression, concentrated their efforts mainly on the student population, the urban petty bourgeoisie and the petty-bourgeois intelligentsia. Although in certain years links were set up between various groups of underground revolutionaries, no nation-wide organisation was ever set up. This lack of co-ordination in the activities of the national-revolutionaries can in large measure be put down to the conditions of life obtaining in Indian society at that time and the ethnic, regional, caste and, most important of all, religious barriers shaping that society.

Insofar as religion, and also other traditional institutions, still shaped the attitudes of the vast majority of Indians, any appeal to the minds of the masses had to be presented in religious terms. This applied both to the extremists' work and to that of the underground revolutionaries, whose ideology in the years 1905-1908 came to a large extent under the influence of Aurobindo Ghosh (after 1909 he abandoned active politics and concentrated his energies on religious reform, teaching and the elaboration of philosophical problems). This explains why only Hindus joined the underground revolutionary organisations, despite appeals for peace and harmony between the various religious communities. Meanwhile the activities of the radical elements among the Indian Moslems proceeded within the framework of the communal organisations.

### Indian Revolutionaries in Exile

The radical petty-bourgeois trend in the Indian national liberation movement at the beginning of the twentieth century developed not only in India itself but also beyond the country's borders. Revolutionary organisations led by Indian émigrés were set up in Europe and later in the United States and in Eastern countries. The first centre of Indian émigrés was set up in 1905 in London. An émigré by the name of Shyamati Krishnavarma founded the Society of Indian Home Rule. Krishnavarma published a nationalist journal entitled *Indian*



*Sociologist*, which rallied its readers to fight for India's independence. The centre round which the Indian émigrés in London grouped was Krishnavarma's "India House", a hostel for Indian students at British universities. The leaders of this organisation included, apart from Krishnavarma, V. Savarkar, Virendranath Chattopadhyaya, S. Ravabhai Rana, V. V. S. Iyer and others. Harassment by the British police compelled the majority of members from this London group to move to Paris by 1909-1910. A second large centre of Indian émigrés was set up there in the period 1910-1914.

After the formation of the Paris group (the most prominent members of which included R. Cama, Har Dayal, and also S. Krishnavarma, S. R. Rana, V. Chattopadhyaya and V. V. S. Iyer who had come there from London) the international contacts of left-wing groups of the Indian national liberation movement became much wider, whereas earlier these had been confined mainly to links with British Liberals and Labour party members. Cama, Rana, Har Dayal and others established contacts not only with French socialists, but also with revolutionaries from other European countries, particularly with émigrés from Russia (Social Democrats), and also with the Socialist International. The Paris centre started to collaborate with underground organisations in India and to dispatch there the journals which it published—*Indian Sociologist* (edited by Krishnavarma) and *Bande Mataram* (edited by R. Cama and S. R. Rana). After the First World War broke out this Paris group of Indian revolutionaries in exile was virtually disbanded: Cama and Rana were interned, Krishnavarma went to Switzerland and Chattopadhyaya to Berlin. Publication of their journals also ceased.

In addition to these organisations in Europe, nationalist organisations were also founded at the same period in North America—in both Canada and the United States. The first organisations (the United Indian League, for example), were groups set up by Indian émigrés in order to campaign for equal rights on a par with those enjoyed by their fellow-workers in factories and offices in America and Canada. However, under the influence of the Indian revolutionaries arriving in those countries, these organisations soon acquired a political character.

An important role in the propagation of opposition to the British colonial regime was that played by the Bengali, Taraknath Das, who arrived in Canada in 1906. In 1908 Das, who by this time had moved to the United States, started publishing a journal entitled *Free Hindustan*, which proved very popular among Indian émigrés. The socio-political ideas adhered to by T. Das were coloured by a critical approach to modern bourgeois civilisation from an egalitarian standpoint. In his famous *Open Letter* to Lev Tolstoy he wrote that he believed in the universal brotherhood of man and was opposed to any form of exploitation of any one people, race, society, or individual by another. The propaganda work carried out by T. Das prepared the ground for the formation of a large-scale organisation for

Indian revolutionaries in exile, the main initiator of which was Har Dayal.

After arriving in San Francisco in 1911, Har Dayal was soon to become a prominent figure among Indian émigrés in the United States. In 1913 the newspaper *Ghadar* (Uprising) was set up at his initiative and with the title chosen in memory of the popular uprising of 1857-1859. In the same year the Indian Association was set up at the congress of representatives from various Indian communities in America, and the leading light behind it was again Har Dayal. Before long the Party had been renamed *Ghadar*. It had a wide network of branches in America and also in various countries of the Pacific, including Japan, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaya and China. The members of this organisation evolved several plans for an uprising in India, for the implementation of which combat groups were set up by the émigrés, groups which according to the plans of the party leaders were to provide the nucleus organisation for the insurgents. To this end money collected from the émigrés, some of whose numbers were from fairly rich backgrounds, was used to purchase arms. The weekly newspaper *Ghadar* and brochures put out by the party members in the United States in several Indian languages, which were then distributed in India itself, provided a powerful means of propaganda for fostering anti-British feeling among the masses.

The First World War, that broke out in the summer of 1914, was to influence the position adopted by petty-bourgeois revolutionaries, as indeed that of other socio-political forces in India.

### Indian Capital During the War Years

In the years 1913-1917 a number of Indian banks went bankrupt and this dealt a serious blow at Indian-owned enterprises both in the production sphere, and in that of commodity circulation. This phenomenon was essentially a result of the colonial character of the economic structure in India, and of the lack of support for Indian banking capital from the state and the powerful British banks established in that country.

During the war years British plunder of India intensified. An enormous amount of food, agricultural and industrial raw materials, a large part of the output of the mining and metallurgical industries were exported, thus making it difficult to expand internal production. The British treasury attempted to cut down on its colossal war-time expenses by increasing the demands it made upon the ordinary Indian taxpayer. Not only the masses, but also the propertied classes in India suffered as a result of this policy. The financial and currency machinations of the colonial authorities and British businessmen gave rise to inflation (in 1914-1918 the overall total of currency notes in circulation nearly tripled) and to sharp rises in silver prices.



Disruption of India's foreign trade links led to a sharp drop in the country's exports and imports. All this had a negative effect upon the country's economic position.

Tighter state control and regulation of finances and foreign trade, the placing of large military orders at Indian enterprises, and enormous purchases made within the home market by the treasury served to promote the emergence of state capitalism within the Indian economy. The Indian owners of local enterprises were hampered in their activities more and more by the restrictions stemming from the economic policy pursued by the colonial state.

At the same time conditions were being created that favoured the enrichment of the local bourgeoisie, insofar as the bulk of the commodities purchased by British organisations and departments in India during the war years were produced in enterprises belonging to Indian industrialists. The number of joint-stock companies registered in India increased during this period by almost ten per cent, and their total capital by almost 30 per cent. While the share of imported and hand-made textiles was diminishing, the total share of fabrics produced by Indian mills and consumed in the country increased considerably and by 1917 accounted for over one-third. The level and extent of the profits obtained by Indian factory-owners increased considerably during the war years.

Economic problems were exacerbated by a curtailment of the internal market resulting both from the growing poverty of the bulk of the population and also from the lack of opportunities for the import of capital equipment. In these conditions there were very limited possibilities for investing the money accumulated by various groups of the Indian industrial bourgeoisie, as well as the merchants and the money-lenders.

All this left its mark on the political stand adopted by the national bourgeoisie, in whose ranks dissatisfaction with the colonial regime was growing, despite their wholehearted support for the British military effort. Both within the National Congress and the Muslim League (the main national organisations) opposition was growing stronger.

#### **The National Congress and the Muslim League on the Eve of and During the First World War. The Home Rule Movement**

When the mass movement had entered its period of decline the extremist wing, which had not set up an organisation of its own, fell into disarray. Some of the leaders, such as Tilak, were in prison, others, like Aurobindo Ghosh, abandoned the political struggle, while a third group, that of B. Ch. Pal and his followers, began to adopt a

more moderate stand. The leaders of the moderates, who dominated the Congress, at a time when the underground revolutionary organisations were becoming more active, hastened to declare their loyalty to the British colonial regime. In 1912 the Congress Constitution was adopted, which announced the official aim of the national movement to be the achievement of self-government for India within the framework of the British Empire, but only by "constitutional means". Provision was made for a system to elect delegates to the annual sessions of the Congress which prevented left nationalists from being elected to the leadership. However, a move towards rapprochement between the two groups was soon to be observed in the ranks of both the extremists and the moderates.

In 1914, Tilak on the completion of his sentence was released from prison. The widespread rejoicing at his return to the political arena showed that he was as popular as ever in nationalist circles. Under a certain amount of pressure from the authorities, and also for tactical reasons, Tilak declared his loyal recognition of British rule in India and condemned terrorist activity. The line now adopted by Tilak consisted for all intents and purposes in a switch from boycott tactics to mass-scale political agitation, which enabled the extremists to re-establish their position within the Indian political arena. Tilak and his followers led the Home Rule movement, i.e. the movement for self-government whose initiator was the leader of the Indian Theosophical Society, Annie Besant. In the spring of 1916 Tilak set up in Poona the Home Rule League, which was to bring his followers together in a united organisation. In the course of 1916 branches of the League were set up in various parts of India and in the autumn of that year the All-India Home Rule League, led by Annie Besant, was set up in Madras.

Successful organisation of this mass propaganda campaign consolidated Tilak's position within the national movement. At the same time the moderate nature of his political views, on the one hand, and the growth of the opposition within the National Congress, on the other, paved the way for reconciliation between Tilak and the leaders of the Congress, that was headed by G. K. Gokhale and F. Mehta. After negotiations which took place in 1915-1916, restrictions that had been introduced in the Congress Constitution in 1912 were removed, which made it possible for the extremists led by Tilak to take part in the Congress session at Lucknow in 1916. At that session the activities of the Home Rule Leagues were granted Congress approval.

The Home Rule Leagues became the bases for the extremists' organisational work, and the movement itself provided a means for involving wider sections of the population, mainly from the middle strata, in the struggle for self-government.

The Lucknow session of the Congress witnessed consolidation of all the main forces of the national movement, engaged in legal activities. Apart from the coming together of the two Congress factions, an agreement was also reached with the Muslim



League, whose leadership had recently been taken over by new people.

At the turn of the century a new democratic trend was to be observed within the movement of the Moslem community. This stemmed from the new involvement of the Moslem petty bourgeoisie and intelligentsia in political affairs. The ideologists behind the new trend included Nomani Shibli, Abul Kalam Azad, Muhammad Ali. Their speeches and writings reflected the endeavour to acquaint educated Moslem youth in India with the political problems of the times and to bring it into closer contact with the activity of the country's public organisations.

Criticism of the colonial regime, albeit of the moderate variety, was to be found in the newspapers *Alhila* (Crescent Moon) edited by Azad, *Comrade* edited by M. Ali and *Zamindar*, published by Zafar Ali-khan. A.K. Azad's role in the revolutionary events of 1905-1908 made him still more popular within the middle strata of the Moslem community. The left wing of the Muslim League that rallied round Azad, the brothers Mohammed and Shaikat Ali and others waged a campaign to change the political orientation of the organisation. In 1913 its Constitution was amended. Self-government within the framework of the British Empire became the organisation's declared aim. Although the League remained a communal organisation the charter now contained references to the essential need for co-operation with other national organisations.

This victory of the left wing within the League was consolidated by the election in 1915 to the post of President of M. A. Jinnah, who had enjoyed the active support of Azad and other left leaders.

These changes prepared the ground for a formal agreement between the League and the Congress concerning their readiness to engage in united action in order to achieve self-government: this agreement was an important landmark on the way towards the unification of all anti-imperialist forces. At the same time it was also laid down in the Lucknow Pact that within the elective legislative organs the League would be granted a monopoly in the representation of Moslems, who could only be elected by their special electorate. This concession made by the Congress leadership to the principle of communal representation provided ground for the continuation of the British policy to set Hindus off against Moslems. However, the signing of the agreement between the leaders of the Congress and the League (a meeting of the League was also held in Lucknow) was seen by the Indian public at large to mark the establishment of Hindu-Moslem unity in the fight for the country's independence.

### The Initial Stage of M. K. Gandhi's Political Activity

A landmark in the socio-political development at this time was the appearance on the scene of the future leader of the national liberation

movement, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948) who returned to India in 1914. Gandhi came from a prosperous Gujarat family belonging to the merchant cast of Banyas, employed in the service of the ruler of a small principality in Gujarat. After graduating from university in Britain, Gandhi lived in South Africa between 1903 and 1914, where he practised law. It was there that his political activities began, when he started to defend the rights of the Indian émigrés who were subjected to cruel discrimination (the Indian community there totalled over a hundred thousand). During his years in South Africa Gandhi's philosophical and socio-political ideas took more or less final shape, and were to determine the tactics he adopted later in the fight against British colonialism. It was there that he tried out in practice the principles of non-violent resistance or *satyagraha* (holding firmly to the truth), which were evolved to a large extent under the influence of the events of Russian social and political life at the beginning of the twentieth century. The experience gleaned from the revolutionary events in Russia, and in particular that of the nation-wide political strike, convinced Gandhi of the need for organised mass action as a means of bringing pressure to bear on political opponents. In an evaluation of the 1905 events in Russia, Gandhi stressed that "even the most powerful of rulers cannot rule without the co-operation of the ruled". From the writings of Tolstoy on the subject of non-violence Gandhi adopted his strategy of non-violent struggle. In 1908 he organised his first civil disobedience campaign, i.e. organised rejection of the discriminatory laws instituted by the colonial regime in South Africa.

Before starting each campaign Gandhi arranged negotiations with the authorities. He endeavoured to achieve a compromise with the latter even in the course of his *satyagraha* campaign. By directing attention to the non-violent, peaceful nature of his activities, he demonstrated quite clearly his loyalty to the British authorities. In 1906 Gandhi headed a medical detachment manned by Indians, which worked on the side of the colonial troops during the military expedition to Zulu territory, and later, during the First World War, he came out in active support of Britain, participating in the campaign to recruit peasants into the army in his native Gujarat.

The successful implementation of several civil disobedience campaigns in Africa and numerous articles in the press, particularly those in the journal he himself edited, entitled *Indian Opinion* (which supported the national movement in his homeland), made Gandhi's name more and more famous and popular in India itself. After returning to his own country, Gandhi, with the support of the Gujarat bourgeoisie, set up in 1915 an organisation in Ahmadabad for the propagation of *satyagraha* ideas—the Satyagraha-Ashram, and then successfully organised three civil disobedience campaigns for non-violent resistance in 1915 in the state of Rajkot to abolish certain customs tariffs; in 1917 to reform the system for the recruitment of coolies for work outside India; in late 1917 and early



1918 in Bihar against the system of exploitation of peasants by the British planters. These campaigns had a strong impact on public opinion and brought Gandhi to the forefront of Indian political life. His speeches and writings served to convince the nationalists of the need to involve the masses in the fight against the colonial regime.

### **Revolutionary Underground Organisations During the First World War**

The war period saw renewed activity on the part of the petty-bourgeois national-revolutionary organisations. The beginning of hostilities in Europe and other theatres of war to which were sent the main forces of the British army and fleet created what the leaders of the Ghadar Party saw as highly favourable, unique conditions for the implementation of their plans for an armed uprising in India. During the first months of the war, in response to a call from the leadership of the party, thousands of members and sympathisers among Indian émigrés returned home by various routes, often by way of China, Siam or Burma. Some of the Ghadar leaders also returned under Sohan Singh Bhakna. In 1914-1915 close on 8,000 Indians returned home. Efforts, mainly unsuccessful ones, were made to send large shipments of arms to India. The Ghadar members on returning home succeeded in establishing contacts with the local underground organisations and with the support of foreign émigré organisations, whose activities were co-ordinated by the émigrés' Berlin committee, began to make preparations for an uprising. Insofar as the majority of the Ghadar members were Sikhs by religion the party enjoyed its widest influence in the Punjab.

A decisive role in this uprising was to be played by the soldiers of units in the Anglo-Indian army, among whom the Ghadar Party had carried out successful anti-British propaganda. The uprising which was to begin with mutinies of several garrisons in North and North-West India was initially scheduled to begin in November 1914, but later the date was postponed till February 1915. However, the weak organisation and also the activities of agents provocateur among the ranks of the Ghadar members who leaked out the plans for the uprising to the authorities made its complete fiasco inevitable. Thousands of underground activists and those who took part in the "agrarian disturbances" that had started up in the Punjab were arrested and brought to trial. The revolt of the Sepoy regiment in Singapore in November 1915 was an isolated outbreak and therefore easily suppressed. The Ghadar members attempted to continue the struggle despite these setbacks but since they had no proper leadership or material backing their attempts were soon frustrated. By the end of the war the Ghadar centres in the United States and other countries of the Pacific had all been disbanded.

Parallel with this Ghadar campaign, preparations were being made for a violent overthrow of the colonial regime in India by an underground organisation of Moslem nationalists that had grown up round the Moslem school Dar-ul-Ulum in Deoband (North India). This organisation was led by Mahmud Hassan, ideologist of the extreme left, national-revolutionary wing within the Moslem communal movement. Hassan and his followers waged their propaganda campaign against the British in the name of pan-Islam and in defence of the rights of the Turkish Caliph. The Deoband centre attempted to establish contacts with Moslems outside India and also with the governments of countries engaged in hostilities with Britain, in particular Germany and the Ottoman empire. In 1915 one of Hassan's comrades in arms, Obeidullah Sindhi, arrived in Kabul for negotiations with the representatives of the émigré centre in Berlin and the German military and diplomatic mission. At the same time he also attempted to persuade Habibullah, the Amir of Afghanistan, to come out against the British which would have given a signal to the Pathan tribesmen in the border territories to rise up against them as well.

However, Habibullah continued to pursue a policy of neutrality. The conspiracy, that came to be known as the "Silk Letter Conspiracy" in view of the material on which the plans had been drawn up, was exposed by the British authorities and its members were punished.

Both revolutionaries in India itself, and also the Indian émigrés participating in the fight against colonialism, were counting on support from Britain's enemies in the war. Links with the governments of Germany and Turkey were fostered in the main by the Berlin committee for Indian independence, that had been set up in 1915. In 1916 this committee published a manifesto declaring a state of war between the Indians and Britain. At that time prominent Indian revolutionaries such as Har Dayal and V. Chattopadhyaya were working in the Berlin centre. A provisional Indian government in exile was set up in Kabul with the support of this committee in 1915: its President was Mahendra Pratap, its Prime Minister, Barakatullah, and its Foreign Minister, Obeidullah. In 1916-1917 this provisional government sent its emissaries on three occasions to the government of tsarist Russia in the naive hope of support from first the tsarist government and later the Russian provisional government.

By the end of the war it was clear to the national revolutionaries that neither imperial Germany nor the Ottoman empire was interested in supporting India's struggle against the colonial regime. In 1916 the majority of the active members of the Berlin centre moved to Stockholm where they continued to engage in anti-colonial propaganda.

Despite the accumulation of "combustible material" in Indian politics, none of the three main trends within the national move-



ment—those of the moderates, extremists and national-revolutionaries—succeeded in wresting any major concessions from the colonial regime. However the work of these Indian patriots led up to the emergence of certain elements necessary for the development of the revolutionary situation, that evolved in India after the First World War and the victory of the Great October Socialist Revolution in Russia.

# Recent History of India

G. Kotovsky





## **THE FIRST REVOLUTIONARY ONSLAUGHT AND THE EMERGENCE OF POLITICAL MASS ORGANISATIONS (1918-1927)**

The October Revolution in Russia ushered in a general crisis of capitalism, part of which was the crisis of the colonial system. Awakened to political action in the beginning of the twentieth century, the peoples of the East now set out to end imperialist oppression. And the events of the early 1920s in India blended with this great movement, involving almost all the colonies and semicolonies of Asia. India entered modern history locked in battle with British colonialism.

### **HIGH TIDE OF THE NATIONAL LIBERATION MOVEMENT**

#### **Deterioration of the Economic and Political Situation**

The intensive plunder of India during the First World War when Britain shifted most of the military expenditures on her principal colony, had dire consequences for the mass of the people.

The decline of exports of jute, cotton, oil-bearing seed, and other technical crops due to the war-time dislocation of world economic relations, affected the interests of farmers. Landlords and the merchant class tried to cover their losses by intensifying the exploitation of the peasants—the immediate producers. Between 1911 and 1925 the peasants' debt to money-lenders doubled, reaching an estimated total of 6,000 million rupees.

The stepped up exploitation of the peasants by the feudal landlords, colonial state and money-lenders led to a considerable increase in land-transfers. More and more groups of peasants were losing their land through mortgage or sale.

After the peasantry it was the craftsmen and their families who found themselves in the direst straits. The curtailment of production in a number of crafts and cottage industries (particularly cotton weaving) that had taken place on the eve and during the First World War had led to a substantial reduction in the incomes of millions of craftsmen, petty producers and, consequently, the small-scale traders.

The appearance on the labour market of hundreds of thousands



of ruined craftsmen had a negative effect on the position of the industrial proletariat whose real wages sank in value as prices gradually rose.

The economic position in the country was made still more serious by the repercussions of two bad harvests—1918-1919 and 1920-1921. The large fall in food production while grain exports remained unchanged led to widespread famine, the effects of which were made still worse by an epidemic of influenza which took a toll of 13 million lives.

Food shortages and high prices affected the interests of not only the main sections of the working people but also the lower strata of the entrepreneurial class, the intelligentsia and the white-collar workers.

The Indian national bourgeoisie, which had extended its entrepreneurial activity during the war and consolidated its economic position, was now more sensitive than ever to the restrictions resulting from colonial oppression and to the consequences of the discriminatory measures introduced by the colonial authorities in various spheres of the country's economic, political, and cultural affairs.

By the beginning of the 1920s contradictions in India made themselves felt in particular in two spheres: those between the exploiting and the exploited classes, and those between the main classes and social strata of Indian society on the one hand and the British imperialists on the other, who continued to seek the support of the feudal landowning class, the princes and the comprador bourgeoisie, and also that of the traders and money-lenders collaborating with those groups.

The intensification of the national liberation struggle began with new actions on the part of the working class. In 1918 a series of strikes on a fairly large scale for those times took place in Bombay, Madras, Cawnpore and Ahmadabad. These were strikes of a spontaneous, economic character resulting to a large extent from mass dismissals of workers after war-time production was wound up. As the strike campaign gathered momentum, trade unions began to emerge (several organisations for industrial and white-collar workers run on trade-union lines, which had been set up in India at the beginning of the twentieth century, had disintegrated completely by the end of the First World War). They had been organised by bourgeois nationalists and philanthropists. The first trade union was set up in Madras in 1918 by B. P. Wadia, and later a few were set up in Bombay and other industrial centres, including Ahmadabad, where in the same year the Ahmadabad Mill Mazdur Union was set up with the participation of M. K. Gandhi.

The wave of revolutionary sentiments in the country gained new momentum from information concerning the revolution in Russia which was starting gradually to reach India.

## The Influence of the October Revolution on India

News of the February revolution and the overthrow of the tsar which had come to India via the British press made a deep impression on the Indian nationalists who had always regarded the Russian autocracy as a phenomenon on a par with British despotism in India. A brochure published in 1917 by the Home Rule Committee and given the symbolic title *Lessons from Russia* (Home Rule Series-23) contained an appeal to the educated classes to expound to the masses of the Indian people the significance and implications of the liberation movement in Russia. The victorious revolution in Russia inspired Indian nationalists to intensify their liberation struggle. The attitudes to these events of the Indian nationalist press of that time are expressed in an article appearing in the Allahabad newspaper *Abhyudaya* (March 24, 1917) where it was pointed out that the "Russian revolution convinces us that there is no power in the world which an animating and life-giving nationalism could not have overcome".

As the revolutionary events in Russia progressed, the bourgeois press in the West, including that of Britain, began more and more to mislead its readers by indulging in outright slander of the young Soviet Republic. The British authorities subjected publication of information on the events in Russia to rigorous censorship and the printing of communist literature in India was strictly prohibited. However despite all these measures of the colonial administration the truth about the October Revolution spread quite fast to India. Montagu, the Secretary of State for India, and Viceroy Chelmsford were obliged to acknowledge this in the Report on the Indian Constitutional Reform published in 1918: "The revolution in Russia and its beginning was regarded in India as a triumph over despotism.... It has given an impetus to Indian political aspirations."

The people of the Indian villages learnt of what was happening in faraway Russia from demobilised soldiers returning from the battlefields of Europe and the Middle East at the end of the war. This applied to many villages of North India, particularly of the Punjab, where the majority of soldiers had been recruited for the Indian forces which had taken part in the war and also for the military action in Turkestan, Central Asia and the territories bordering on the Caspian Sea.

The Indian nationalist press which had started publishing news of events in Soviet Russia in mid-November 1917 devoted particular attention to Lenin's famous Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia (adopted on November 15, 1917) and the Appeal published on December 3 of the same year by the Council of People's Commissars entitled *To All Muslim Toilers in Russia and the East*.

In the early years after the October Revolution the majority of



Indian nationalists who had welcomed the struggle being waged in Russia had not really appreciated the social implications of those revolutionary events. Nevertheless they did all see the young Soviet state as the champion of the struggle against national and colonial oppression. Even at that stage, however, some of the leaders of the Left wing of the national movement saw the October Revolution as an epoch-making social change.

B. G. Tilak published an editorial in the newspaper *Kesari* (January 29, 1918) defending Lenin against the slanderous attacks on him in the British press and pointing out that "Lenin's influence in the army and among the common people has increased as a result of the distribution of the lands of the nobility to the peasantry...." B. Ch. Pal, another leader of the Left nationalists, who actively supported the basic political principles adhered to by the young Soviet state, declared outright in one of his speeches in 1919 that the Bolsheviks were against all kinds of economic and capitalist exploitation and speculation and that they opposed social inequality.

As a result of the provision of true information about Soviet Russia in the nationalist press, the interest shown by Indian society in the Bolsheviks' programme and policies grew rapidly. Works by Indian authors on Lenin and the Soviet state began to appear at the beginning of the twenties. The first biography of Lenin to appear in India as a separate volume was written in English by the Socialist, G. V. Krishna Rao from South India; it consisted of a brochure entitled *Nikolai Lenin. His Life and Work*, and was published in Madras in 1920. Between 1921 and 1924, in addition to articles in the press, over a dozen books were published in India about Lenin and the October Revolution in Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, Marathi, Kannara and English.

The Left Indian nationalists working in underground revolutionary organisations regarded the Soviet Republic as their close ally in the struggle against the British colonial regime and began to establish direct contacts with Soviet Russia. At the end of 1917 at a meeting of the Moslem nationalists in Delhi a message hailing the Russian revolution was adopted, and it was printed in illegal Indian publications in January 1918. The Khairi brothers—Sattar and Jabbar—were sent to Moscow to deliver this message of greetings to the Soviet Government; they managed to reach the Soviet capital by a round-about route which took them through Europe, by November 1918. In a Memorandum which they delivered to the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs these Indian petty-bourgeois revolutionaries expressed their admiration for the Russian revolution and their hope that Russia would afford assistance to the movement in India fighting for liberation from the colonial yoke. On November 23 the delegation was received by Lenin and two days later it attended a meeting of the All-Russia Central Executive Committee, at which Jabbar Khairi delivered a speech. All that they saw in Moscow and

their meetings with Lenin and Sverdlov made a deep impression on the Indian envoys, as can be seen from the proclamation that was published in India after their return.

Indian revolutionaries in exile also were beginning to establish contacts with Soviet Russia. In March 1918 the President of the Provisional Government of India (Kabul), Mahendra Pratap, arrived in Petrograd. On this occasion a political meeting held to express solidarity with India with Lunacharsky presiding over it. The occasion was described as unforgettable and magnificent in the memoirs later published by Pratap. The following year a visit was paid to Moscow by Barakatullah, the Prime Minister of that government, who in an interview with a correspondent of the *Izvestia* gave the clear outline of the position adopted by Indian revolutionaries in exile with regard to Soviet Russia. He stated that he was neither a Communist nor a Socialist, but in his political programme demanded that the British be driven out of Asia. He saw himself as an irreconcilable enemy of European capitalism in Asia, just as were the Communists, and he stressed that in this respect the Indian revolutionaries in exile and the Communists were natural allies.

Later in 1919 a delegation of Indian revolutionaries in exile led by Mahendra Pratap and Barakatullah visited Moscow and they were received by Lenin on May 7.

Since then there took place several meetings between Lenin and groups of Indian revolutionaries. The leader of the world's first state of workers and peasants took a keen interest in the development of the national liberation struggle in India, which he regarded as an important component of the world's struggle against the imperialists. In an article entitled "Better Fewer, But Better" Lenin wrote: "The outcome of the struggle will be determined by the fact that Russia, India, China, etc., account for the overwhelming majority of the population of the globe. And during the past few years it is this majority that has been drawn into the struggle for emancipation with extraordinary rapidity."\*

On May 20, 1920 when he replied to the official message of greetings received after a rally convened in Kabul by the Indian Revolutionary Association (an organisation set up by A. Bark), Lenin with his remarkable insight drew attention to one of the vital factors determining the success of the struggle in India, namely Hindu-Moslem unity: "We welcome the close alliance of Moslem and non-Moslem elements. We sincerely want to see this alliance extended to all the toilers of the East."\*\*

Thus, the victory of the October Revolution promoted a considerable expansion of the international ties established by the

\* V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 33, p. 500.

\*\* V. I. Lenin, "To the Indian Revolutionary Association", *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, p. 138.



Indian liberation movement, and introduced in them a qualitatively new element—an alliance between the world's first socialist state and the national liberation struggle of the peoples of the East.

The effect of this influence on various groups within the Indian national movement varied in impact. The influence of the socialist revolution led to the radicalisation of the social programme put forward by the Left wing of the nationalists, which was gradually coming to understand the historical role of the working class. At a meeting held on December 23, 1919 Tilak stated: "The authority of workers' organisations is going to grow in the process of time and it is the workers who are going to become rulers." \* Lala Lajpat Rai said in his Presidential address at the first session of the All-India Trade Union Congress that "European labour has found another weapon in direct action. On the top comes the Russian worker, who aims to establish the dictatorship of proletariat...." \*\*

The influence of the October Revolution undoubtedly accelerated the adoption of a scientific socialist position by certain groups of extremists and revolutionaries, by members of underground anti-British organisations.

As for the most influential of the national political organisations—the Indian National Congress—on the whole its leaders welcomed the October Revolution, although they did not approve of its socio-political programme. Opening a session of the Indian National Congress in 1917, Annie Besant announced that the "Russian Revolution and the probable rise of a Russian Republic in Europe and Asia, have all entirely changed the conditions before existing in India." \*\*\*

The impact of the October Revolution on India was a long and many-faceted process. The most important and unmistakable lesson drawn from the revolutionary events in Russia by the various classes of Indian society and the socio-political organisations which represented them was that the liberation struggle could only be successful if the masses were actively involved in it.

#### **British Policy in India. The Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms**

The Anglo-Indian colonial administration also reacted to the revolutionary events in Russia, but in its own characteristic style.

\* Quoted in S. G. Sardesai, *India and the Russian Revolution*, New Delhi, PPH, August 1967, p. 24.

\*\* Ibid., p. 39.

\*\*\* *Congress Presidential Addresses (Second Series)* (Madras, 1934), p. 310.

As early as May 1917 Viceroy Chelmsford pointed out to the British government the pressing need to bring about changes in the British policy towards India. This step was due to the fact that the situation in the country had changed under the impact of the Russian Revolution. On August 20 of that year the Secretary of State for India, Montagu, announced in the House of Commons a government statement on policy towards India allegedly aimed at preparing the ground for the establishment of a responsible government in that country. In keeping with this announcement Montagu and Chelmsford prepared for the British government and Parliament a report on British policy in India, which was published in July 1918. The main points in this report were incorporated in the Government of India Act passed in 1919 by the British Parliament, which later came to be known as the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms.

The Act provided for a certain extension of the electorate for the central (1 per cent of the adult population) and the provincial (3 per cent of the adult population) legislative councils, as opposed to the 0.2 per cent of all adults entitled to vote after the Morley-Minto reform of 1909.

In the lower (Legislative Assembly) and upper (Council of State) chambers of the Central legislature and in provincial legislative councils a stable elected majority soon emerged.

Indians were granted seats in the Viceroy's and provincial governors' executive councils and were allowed to assume ministerial posts in charge of departments dealing with health, education and certain other spheres of secondary importance in the colonial administration. Though the Indian element in the central Executive was increased, the Executive remained responsible to the British Parliament.

These provisions of the administrative reforms represented a certain concession to the propertied classes of India and were aimed at driving a wedge between the nationalistically inclined bourgeoisie, the landlords, and the powerful sections of the intelligentsia from bourgeois and landowning families on the one hand, and the national liberation movement on the other. Another important provision aimed at dividing the ranks of the Indian nationalists was that introducing the system of communal representation into the procedures for elections to the legislative councils, which not only provided for separate voting by Hindus and Moslems but had also ensured certain privileges for the latter group. In those provinces where the Moslems constituted a minority of voters, they were nevertheless guaranteed 30 per cent of all seats in the legislative councils; where Moslems constituted the majority they were assured of more than half the total number of seats. In the new Government of India Act provision was made for the further elaboration of British policy aimed at setting off Hindus against Moslems.



Despite a certain extension of opportunities for representatives of the upper echelons of Indian society to be employed high up in the country's administrative apparatus, the British had not relinquished virtually any of their power. As before they were in complete control of all matters concerning finance, the army, the police, etc. In addition the Viceroy and the provincial governors retained the right to dissolve the legislative councils and also to veto the decisions adopted by the latter, as they thought fit. This power structure in which the elective principle and limited responsibility of Indian ministers to the legislative councils was combined with the autocratic power of the Viceroy and his representatives—the provincial governors—came to be known as the dyarchy (dual government). To gain a firmer social footing in India, the British at the same time also adopted measures to strengthen the apparatus used to suppress the national liberation movement in the country.

In 1918 a report was published that had been drawn up by a committee presided over by the British Justice Rowlatt describing anti-government activity in India. The conclusions and proposals outlined by the committee for intensifying repression against freedom fighters in India provided the basis for the special law, known as the Rowlatt Act, made public on March 18, 1919. This new draconian law entitled the Viceroy and the provincial governors among other things to arrest people and deport them without trial.

This carrot-and-stick policy which had been used by the British imperialists in India since the beginning of the twentieth century was now proving a failure. Neither the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms, nor the Rowlatt Act was enough to hold in check the mounting tide of the national liberation struggle. At the same time, these measures provided as it were a catalyst for the mass struggle and for changes in the organised national movement.

#### **Changes in the Congress' Approach. Assumption by M. K. Gandhi of the Leadership of the National Movement**

The return of the extremists led by Tilak to the Indian National Congress, and the activity of the Home Rule leagues all helped promote the gradual emergence of opposition to the party's moderate, liberal leadership. An open split in the Congress took place in August 1918 at a special session in Bombay at which reactions to the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms were discussed. A majority of votes rejected the British proposals as inadequate, unsatisfactory and disappointing. The National Congress was coming to express more and more forcefully the

opposition sentiments widespread among the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois strata of the population.

The Right-wing members of the Congress led by Surendranath Banerjea and certain other leaders of the moderates left the Congress and set up a new party, known as the Liberal Federation. This political organisation whose members were drawn from the upper echelons of the bourgeoisie and landlord classes represented to a large extent the interests of the Indian comprador bourgeoisie, which, in the years that followed, without fail gave its complete support to the colonial regime and never played a role of any significance in the socio-political affairs of the country.

From that time onwards Gandhi's influence within the Congress grew apace. His successful organisation in India of two *satyagraha* campaigns and his active participation in the organisation of the workers' trade union in Ahmadabad, frequent articles in the press and speeches at political meetings had made Gandhi one of the most popular figures among Indian nationalists by the beginning of the twenties. He collaborated with the Congress but initially worked outside it.

Gandhi's first major action aimed at developing a mass movement on a nation-wide scale was the organisation of a protest campaign against the Rowlatt Acts. In 1918 with a group of his helpers and followers he formulated and signed the oath of a *satyagraha*, in which he solemnly swore to resist through civil disobedience this and similar laws aimed at suppressing the national movement in India. In Bombay Gandhi organised a *satyagraha sabha* (*satyagraha* alliance) which began to collect signatures for the "*satyagraha* oath". Success in this campaign enabled Gandhi to take the next step, and in the name of the *sabha* and in protest at the Rowlatt Act he appealed to the country in March 1919 to embark upon a *hartal* (literally—shutting shop) which meant the cessation of all business activities everywhere. The appeal to spend this day in fasting and prayer was addressed not only to Hindus but to Moslems as well. The day chosen for the *hartal* was April 6, 1919. The broad response to Gandhi's appeal and the support given to this initiative by the Congress showed that Gandhi was becoming the universally acknowledged leader of the national movement.

Gandhi's rapid emergence as the national leader can be explained by the fact that his socio-political and philosophical views, which had in the main taken shape as early as the twenties, and his programme and tactics in the freedom struggle enjoyed the support of extremely diverse sections of Indian society.

The ideal of petty-bourgeois utopian socialism of the Indian peasant, craftsman, worker in small-scale industry and petty trader found expression in Gandhi's critique of modern bourgeois civilisation, of large-scale mechanised industry and capitalist urbanisation, and in his programme for a revival and extension of craft and cottage industries and for decentralisation of the



country's economy to be based in future on economically self-sufficient rural communities.

At a time when social consciousness was far from developed and feudal survivals were still predominant in much of India's economic, social and cultural life, the religious and moral form of Gandhi's messages to the people made his ideas accessible to the illiterate masses of his country. This task was made easier still in view of the fact that his philosophical ideas, while based on Hinduism, also incorporated eclectic borrowings from Islam, Christianity and other religions.

Gandhi's popularity was further enhanced by the ascetic simplicity of his personal life, his broad contacts with the people (he only travelled third class, for instance, and spoke many Indian languages), his subtle understanding of human nature and his ability to catch the mood of the poor and uneducated sections of the population.

The overall strategic aim which Gandhi set himself was an advance towards independence that would be gradual and would proceed in stages. The main political task stemming from this aim was to unite all classes and political forces within Indian society under a single bourgeois-national leadership. This explains why Gandhi opposed class struggle within Indian society and consistently supported a spirit of compromise for the resolution of social and economic conflicts in the towns and villages, designed to establish class peace. In a society that was rent by deep religious and caste differences Gandhi placed special emphasis in his ideological and political work on unity between the Hindus and the Moslems, and on co-operation between the country's various ethnic and caste groups.

At the same time Gandhi was well aware that it would be possible to unite all Indian nationalists and wage a successful struggle to implement his programme, only if the masses participated in the freedom struggle on a wide front. Gandhi saw in *satyagraha* a combination of active opposition to the colonial regime with non-violence, that would provide a universal method for the involvement of broad sections of the population in the national liberation movement, while ensuring that the leadership of the movement remained in the hands of national-bourgeois forces.

This political programme and these tactics evolved by Gandhi, who actively supported the development of Indian capitalist enterprise, gained widespread support from the core of the Indian national bourgeoisie and the landlords who entertained nationalist sympathies. By the early twenties he had become the political leader of the Indian national bourgeoisie. At this new stage of the anti-colonial struggle the figure of Gandhi was a symbol of unity of the main trends within Indian bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalism.

### The Beginnings of Mass Struggle. Jallianwala Bagh

The organisation of *hartals* in many Indian towns in April 1919 marked the beginning of a new phase in the development of the revolutionary advance—from the economic strikes of 1918 to mass actions involving broad strata of the urban population, and occasionally reaching the supreme form of struggle—armed uprising.

The most striking successes at this time were those scored in the Punjab. This can be explained by a number of factors: firstly, the Punjab paid the highest "blood-tax" of all (i. e. provided the largest proportion of recruits for the Anglo-Indian army), the peasant farmers of the Punjab, regarded as the granary of India, bore the brunt of military expenditure, and the artisans and small industries of the Punjab were hit particularly hard by competition from large-scale industry. Secondly, the Punjab was situated nearer than other provinces of British India to Soviet Central Asia, which meant that news of revolutionary developments there penetrated this province more quickly, particularly after Sikh soldiers started returning home. Thirdly the Ghadar Party still enjoyed considerable influence in the Punjab as also did the revolutionaries in exile who maintained close contact with the former.

Anti-British meetings and demonstrations organised by local nationalists began as early as March in many towns of the Punjab. On April 10, the British authorities banished two popular leaders from Amritsar, Dr. S. Kitchlew and Satyapal, which triggered off the rapid spread of a new wave of protest. After that, in other major centres of the province—Lahore and Gujranwala—*hartals* and rallies developed into armed action against the British administration, in which workers—particularly those from the railways—took an active part.

The colonial authorities in the Punjab led by Governor O'Dwyer and General Dyer resolved to wreak cruel revenge upon the political activists. It was to this end that military reinforcements were called to the Punjab as early as April 9. On April 13 the troops opened fire against the unarmed men and women attending a protest rally against the banishment of Kitchlew and Satyapal. About one thousand defenceless men and women were killed in cold blood in Amritsar's Jallianwala Bagh square and another two thousand wounded. As a result of the curfew imposed by General Dyer many people in the square and the adjoining streets died from their wounds since all medical assistance was cut off. In the Punjab martial law was imposed, mass arrests, public executions, etc. also followed.

However this cruel repression did not achieve the goal the British had been hoping for. On the contrary, in Lahore and Amritsar self-defence detachments were set up, armed for the most part with no more than sticks. Hence the name of the detachments *Danda fauj* (Truncheon Army). Mass-scale political action continued



throughout the province. Attacks on police stations became more frequent as also forcible release of prisoners. With the help of local peasants railway workers were able to derail several army trains.

Although the British censored reports of events in the Punjab, news of what had happened in Amritsar spread throughout the country causing a storm of indignation. Anti-British rallies and demonstrations were particularly violent in the country's leading industrial centres—Bombay, Calcutta, Madras and Cawnpore. In Ahmadabad textile workers started engaging in mass-scale political action.

Gandhi, who was worried by this time lest the movement lose its non-violent character, sought to pacify the people of Ahmadabad and then tried to leave for the Punjab. However the British authorities would not permit him to undertake that journey.

Lenin had closely followed the events in the Punjab: in a passage devoted to the liberation movement in the countries of the East, he summed up the new stage in the national liberation movement of India in the following words: "British India is at the head of these countries, and there revolution is maturing in proportion, on the one hand, to the growth of the industrial and railway proletariat, and, on the other, to the increase in the brutal terrorism of the British, who with ever greater frequency resort to massacres (Amritsar), public floggings, etc."\*

The revolutionary events of 1919 were for the main part not controlled in any way by the National Congress. For this reason it became essential for the Congress to change its attitude to the work of mass organisations in order for it to retain its prestige and influence. At a conference specially held in Amritsar in 1919 as a sign of protest against British brutality a resolution was adopted calling upon Congress members to organise trade unions for the workers.

At the same conference it was decided to boycott elections to the legislatures which were to be held in accordance with the new Government of India Act. Elections to the Central and provincial legislatures were subsequently abandoned.

#### **The First Civil Disobedience Campaign. The Khilafat Movement**

The experience of the mass political activity in 1919 led Gandhi to conclude that it was now essential to elaborate a detailed stage-by-stage programme for conducting *satyagraha* campaigns. Only then would it be possible, he argued, to keep the struggle non-violent. Gandhi held that two distinct stages were essential for a nation-wide campaign of non-co-operation with the colonial

\* V. I. Lenin, "Third Congress of the Communist International," *Collected Works*, Vol. 32, p. 455.

administration. The first stage would involve the following forms of boycott directed against the colonial regime: renunciation of honorary appointments and titles; boycott of official receptions, etc.; boycott of British schools, colleges and law courts; boycott of elections to the legislatures; boycott of imported goods. The second stage would be refusal to pay state taxes.

The campaign was scheduled to begin on August 1, 1920. It was prepared and organised by Gandhi and his followers in close collaboration with the leaders of the Khilafat movement, which had been set up by the Moslem intelligentsia and religious leaders in order to defend the rights of the Turkish sultan—the Caliph—who was seen as the religious leader of all the Sunnite Moslems, including the Moslems of India. The movement immediately assumed an anti-imperialist character, insofar as its members saw the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the overthrow of the Sultan, the Caliph, as directly linked with the policy of the Western powers in the East, particularly that of Britain. The broad masses of the Moslem population in India saw the anti-colonial aspect of the movement, rather than the religious one, as the most important. Furthermore the rank and file of the movement often referred to it simply as the Khilafat movement (from the word *khilaf* which means "against"), i. e. directed against Britain. This trend became more marked as a result of the war of independence waged by Afghanistan on India's North-West border. The war waged within this neighbouring Moslem state was actively supported by insurgent Pathan tribes in the North-West Frontier Province.

The leadership of the movement was in the hands of the Khilafat Committee that represented the Left petty-bourgeois wing of the Muslim League, that had broken away from the latter in 1918. The parallel development of the Khilafat movement and the civil disobedience campaign created a favourable climate for the establishment of co-operation and joint action in the liberation struggle by the two main religious communities, those of the Hindus and the Moslems. Gandhi established close contacts with the Khilafat Committee led by the Ali brothers, Muhammad and Shaukat, who were members of the National Congress. Symbolic of this newly established co-operation was the recognition of Gandhi as one of the leaders of the Khilafat Committee.

The civil disobedience campaign which had begun on August 1 and which took the form of rallies, demonstrations and various *hartals*, gradually spread to more and more parts of the country. It was announced by Gandhi and was conducted by him without any consultation with Congress leaders. Nevertheless the success of Gandhi's political tactics now came to exert a growing influence on the country's leading national organisation. This fact is illustrated by the Congress sessions held in 1920. At an extraordinary session held in Calcutta at the beginning of September, despite objections from a number of acknowledged leaders of the organisation,



including Lala Lajpat and Rai C.R. Das, the programme of non-cooperation put forward by Gandhi was adopted. The Congress reaffirmed its refusal to take part in the elections organised on the basis of the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms.

The victory scored by Gandhi and his supporters was consolidated once and for all at the next session of the Congress held in December of the same year in Nagpur. The session adopted a political programme and political tactics evolved by Gandhi. His philosophy—Gandhism—now became the official ideology of the Congress. First of all a charter was drawn up which marked the transformation of the Congress into a mass political organisation. High-level Congress bodies were instituted that were to function between sessions. It provided for a broader-based All-India Congress Committee and the comparatively small Working Committee complete with local branches in the provinces. In order to bring the Congress nearer to the masses and to control the activities of individual peoples aimed at achieving national self-determination and to oppose the administrative and territorial divisions of the country foisted upon it by the colonialists, local branches of the Congress were set up on a national basis—i. e. on the basis of the so-called Congress linguistic provinces.

The results of this reorganisation of the Congress were not long in making themselves felt: by the end of the following year the Congress had close on ten million members. A volunteer corps, consisting of young members of the Congress, numbered 150,000 as early as the autumn of 1920. The volunteers took upon themselves the organisation of the rallies, demonstrations and picketing connected with the civil disobedience movement and it was they who constituted the backbone of the party.

In addition to the civil disobedience movement and the Khilafat movement directed against the British colonialists, class activity organised by the workers and peasants began to develop on a wider scale.

### **The Workers' and Peasants' Movement in the Early Twenties**

In 1920 and 1921 the strike movement grew from strength to strength (on an average between 400 and 600 thousand people came out on strike). In comparison with the preceding stage of the movement (1918-1919) the organised workers' movement was now exhibiting traits hitherto unseen. The class unity of the workers was stronger now, indeed more and more often workers were organising solidarity strikes; this could be gleaned from the general strikes in Bombay, Jamshedpur and other industrial centres.

The economic struggle of the working class now came to be linked ever more closely with the overall political struggle—that is with the non-cooperation movement.

Even some of the most backward sections of the Indian working class like the plantation labourers were now being drawn into the struggle. In May 1921 the tea plantations of Assam were hit by a huge strike involving close on twelve thousand workers.

As the strike struggle progressed, a struggle in which workers, as a rule, managed to achieve fulfilment of their main demands with regard to wage increases and improved working conditions, new trade unions were being set up. Conditions were gradually taking shape which undoubtedly favoured the organisation of an all-India trade union centre. A pointer to the interest in such an undertaking was provided by a mass protest-meeting against the appointment by the colonial authorities of the Indian workers' delegate to the International Labour Conference in Geneva. At that meeting held in Bombay in May 1920 a resolution was adopted calling for the founding of an All-India Trade Union Congress (AITUC). The leadership of this Trade Union Congress was in the hands of bourgeois reformists. One of the National Congress leaders—Lala Lajpat Rai—was elected its first president.

The setting up of this organisation led to an extension of the front in the strike movement; while nineteen strikes had been organised in 1919, the 1920 figure was two hundred, and that for 1921 four hundred. As in previous years, however, the strikes often began in a haphazard fashion and were inefficiently organised.

Despite the weaknesses in the work of the All-India Trade Union Congress its formation represented a definite break-through in the development of the organised workers' movement and the trade union movement in India.

The consolidation of the trade union movement placed before the Congress the task of intensifying propaganda work within the unions in order to preserve and extend its influence on the working class. To this end a special Congress committee was set up in January 1921.

In the autumn of 1920, the movement also spread to rural areas. The greatest peasant activity was that of 1921-1922 in the United Provinces, particularly in the Eastern districts where memories of the popular uprising of 1857-1859 were still very much alive. The first outbreaks of peasant discontent took place in the districts of Fyzabad and Rae Bereli where the tenant farmers who belonged as a rule to the lower castes, destroyed the crops in the fields of the local *zamindars*, raided their households and also the offices of money-lenders and traders in the trade centres and small towns. Leaders began to emerge from among the ranks of the peasantry. Some of them used as a means of mass agitation the traditional plays acted out at rural fairs and the recitals of wandering poets and musicians.

These spontaneous actions which continued throughout the first half of 1921 were ruthlessly suppressed by military and police forces. Several thousand people were arrested in the course of the repression.

Similar characteristics were exhibited by the peasant movement in the Sultanpur district of the United Provinces in the middle and latter part of 1921.



The struggle of the peasants from the United Provinces attained a higher level in Oudh, where in 1921-1922 armed detachments of tenant farmers known as *Eka* (Unity) were active. The insurgent peasants here seized land and property belonging to the *talukdars* and for a long time they held out resolutely against the punitive detachments sent to put them down. The most famous leaders of these peasants were Passi Madari and Sahreb, both of whom came from the lower castes.

Peasant activity in the United Provinces, despite its spontaneous and localised character and the poor co-ordination between the various detachments, the lack of any kind of programme, etc., was definitely directed against feudal lords and money-lenders.

In the course of the peasants' struggle in some areas the first seeds of a peasants' organisation appeared in the form of the first peasant leagues (*Kisan Sabha*). Congress members who had come out to the rural areas took part in their organisation including the young Jawaharlal Nehru who was first arrested in connection with his involvement in the peasant movement.

Although the Congress and the Khilafat movement enjoyed limited influence in the villages, nevertheless links began to be established between the organised national movement and the spontaneous peasant movement. Cases have been recorded when insurgent peasants in the United Provinces sent petitions to Gandhi and in some places they acted hand in hand with detachments of Congress volunteers.

While the peasant movement in the United Provinces bore a clearly distinguishable class character and marked the advent of a new historical era, other large-scale peasant activities (in the Punjab and Malabar for instance) still bore the mark of the times that were now gradually being relegated to the past. The struggle of the peasants here, as before, was in religious guise.

In the Punjab in 1921-1922 Sikh peasants rose up on several occasions against the *Mohunts* who led the Sikhs' religious organisation which had taken over the supervision of temple property and incomes from lands belonging to the temples. In its implications this was a struggle of the peasants—owners of small plots and tenant farmers—against the feudal lords, while in its form it was a movement calling for the re-establishment of democratic traditions in the life of the Sikh community. Within the community there now emerged the Akali sect (the Immortals) which undertook by peaceful means to take over Sikh temples or other holy shrines.

Despite the peaceful character of the Akali movement in 1921 near Nankana, and then in 1922 near Guruka-Bagh, holy places of the Sikhs in the Punjab, the defenceless Akalis fell victim to mass reprisals at the hands of the police called out by those in charge of the temples—the *Mohunts*.

After the suppression of the Akali movement in 1923 the sect split, and there emerged a left wing known as Babar-Akali (Lion Akali) which later joined the organisation of underground terrorists in the

Punjab. The non-violent character of the Akalis' struggle won them Gandhi's warmest sympathy and the support of the National Congress.

It was a very different attitude that the Congress and Gandhi adopted to *Eka* and also to the other major peasant movement in the early twenties in the Malabar district of the Madras Province.

In August 1921 a rebellion of the Moplahs started (that is the name applied to Moslems of Malayali extraction who had settled in the south-west of India—in Kerala). Moplah peasants and some of the Moslem religious leaders took part in the uprising, while Moplah merchants remained aloof from it.

The uprising of the Moplahs was triggered off by the attack on a mosque in the small town of Tirurangadi organised by feudal landowners from the high Brahman caste of the Nambudiri. Gradually this uprising spread over a considerable part of the Malabar district and developed into a struggle of the Moplah tenant farmers against the Hindu landlords. In many places Hindu tenant farmers fought side by side with the Moplahs. Despite the religious aspects of this struggle, the Moplahs' uprising was both anti-feudal and anti-colonial in character.

In the talooks of Ernad and Walluvanad the authority of the colonial administration was wiped out and the insurgents set up a "khalifat kingdom", an organisation which inspired the activities of insurgent detachments and carried out the functions of local administration. The "kingdom" was presided over by representatives of local Moslem leaders—first Ali Musaliar and later Kunyahammad Khaji.

Police and military detachments were eventually sent out against the Moplahs. Despite the heroic resistance which they put up and their skilful use of the mountainous wooded terrain where their bases were located, the uprising was finally suppressed at the beginning of the following year. Over thirty thousand Moplahs were taken prisoner.

The British initiated cruel reprisals against the insurgents. While prisoners were being transported by rail, in one of the waggons used for this purpose seventy people died of suffocation.

Although it appointed a special committee of representatives of the general public to investigate this incident at the Podanur railway station, the National Congress severely criticised the Moplah uprising, which had taken the form of an armed struggle. The leaders of the Khilafat Committee adopted a stand similar to that of Gandhi.

In addition to these incidents on the Malabar coast, in the Punjab and in the United Provinces, isolated and spontaneous protests by the peasants flared up in Bengal, the Bombay Presidency and other parts of the country. However the struggle waged by the peasantry still did not constitute an independent or in any way decisive factor in the national liberation movement.



## The Movement in Retreat

At the end of 1921 the political situation in India became far more tense. In the second half of that year the workers' and peasants' movement reached its greatest heights and the non-cooperation movement was growing from strength to strength. The influence of the Congress was on the increase and its mass support was now being consolidated. At the second conference of the All-India Trade Union Congress the Congress consolidated its hold over the organised labour movement.

The climax of political events at this time was the four-day political strike with which the Bombay workers greeted the heir to the British throne, the Prince of Wales, who arrived in India on November 17, 1921. Strikes and demonstrations of protest took place in Madras and other towns.

Although Gandhi condemned the events in Bombay, he had not yet given the signal to retreat at that stage. At the Ahmadabad session of the Congress (December 1921) it was decided to continue the non-cooperation movement until Swaraj was achieved and the Caliph's prerogative was restored. Gandhi was appointed the leader (or "dictator") to conduct the campaign, invested with full powers.

At the same time the colonial administration embarked on mass-scale repression against those taking part in the movement, directing the main force of their activity against the Congress volunteers. By the beginning of 1922 about ten thousand people had been arrested including a number of prominent Congress members—Motilal and Jawaharlal (father and son) Nehru, the Ali brothers, Chitta Ranjan Das, L. L. Rai and others.

On February 1 Gandhi sent an ultimatum to Viceroy Reading demanding an immediate halt to the repressions. Otherwise Gandhi threatened to embark on the second stage of his non-cooperation movement—namely appeal to the people to stop paying taxes.

In a few days, however, Gandhi abruptly changed his tactics. The pretext for this volte-face in Congress policy was the events that occurred on February 4 in the small town of Chauri Chaura (in the Gorakhpur district in the United Provinces) where a crowd of peasants, after driving policemen who had been firing on them into the police-station building, set fire to it.

Gandhi publicly expressed his sympathy for the families of the dead policemen, sharply condemning those who had taken part in this peasant revolt. After announcing that in his opinion the country was not yet ready for non-violent campaigning he gave orders for the civil non-cooperation movement to be discontinued.

Gandhi's decision was dictated by the fact that, in his estimation, on the one hand the forces of national opposition were not yet in a position to withstand the might of the imperialist regime, and on the other the Congress was losing its control over the mass movement.

Gandhi's position was formally supported by a resolution passed by the Congress Working Committee that assembled for an emergency meeting in the small town of Bardoli in Gujarat. The resolution incorporated an appeal to the peasants to abandon their struggle and it expressed sympathy for the landlords. It was proposed that the work of the volunteers' squads should be halted. Members of the Congress were anxious to carry out the constructive programme that Gandhi had proposed, the main point of which was to promote in all possible ways the development of hand-weaving and spinning.

The path chosen by Gandhi and the Congress leaders at this juncture came as a complete surprise for the rank-and-file members of the freedom movement. It gave rise to numerous protests in the mass organisations affiliated to the Congress, it brought the left groups closer together and gave rise to a new wave of underground terrorist activity.

Thus the movement continued its activities but bereft of leadership, and in a climate of mounting repression, it soon weakened.

## THE COUNTER-OFFENSIVE OF BRITISH IMPERIALISM

### British Policy in India 1923-1927

The first revolutionary onslaught of 1918-1922 was followed by a temporary retreat of the national liberation forces and a counter-offensive on the part of the imperialists which continued up until 1927. Changes in the internal political situation in India were a part of these overall processes at work within the capitalist and colonial world and testified to the onset of a period of partial stabilisation of capitalism.

The British bourgeoisie was endeavouring to make up for the economic and political losses it had sustained in India. Relying on direct support from the colonial administration and making use of available economic levers, British industrialists intensified their exports to India, including those of cotton fabrics. Foreign competition on the Indian market was reduced by the following tariff policy: in 1925 the protectionist tariff covering the output of the Indian cotton industry was repealed and, in 1927, that covering local iron production likewise. At the same time excise and tariff duties for rail freight were raised. All these measures made Indian manufactured goods less competitive.

Financial and currency reforms introducing a new rate of exchange for the rupee served to consolidate the existing position of the Indian economy vis-à-vis Britain.

In the political sphere the British imperialists gradually reduced to nought the minor concessions that had been made to the Indian bourgeoisie under the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms. After the civil



non-cooperation movement had been suppressed, the colonial administration, particularly in Bengal, proceeded to suppress any manifestation of opposition.

A policy statement by Lloyd George on India in August 1922 made it clear that the British government had no plans at all to introduce self-rule in India. In the provinces the sweeping powers formerly enjoyed by British colonial officials were restored, and the latter blatantly ignored resolutions taken by the central and provincial legislative bodies. In 1922, for instance, the Viceroy, in defiance of the majority in the central legislature, passed a law providing for repressive measures to be used for the suppression of the national movement in the native states. In Bengal and the Central Provinces the diarchy was formally revoked in 1924-1925.

At the same time, the British colonialists again started to fan hostilities between the Hindus and the Moslems, making wide use of the system of special electorates. This served to galvanise into action the religious communal parties, i.e. the Muslim League and the Hindu Maha Sabha, that had been set up in the early 1900s. An important landmark in the spread of Hindu chauvinism was the session of the Hindu Maha Sabha in 1925, at which appeals were made for the forcible conversion of Indian Moslems to Hinduism. The response of the Moslem religious leaders and communal organisations to this was fanatical anti-Hindu propaganda. It was in these conditions that the British, with the help of the communal organisations of these two religious groups, were able in the period 1923-1927 to provoke a whole series of Hindu-Moslem clashes and mass killings. The co-operation between the two religious groups which had been established during the period of the Khilafat movement had now been undermined.

Support was also afforded the colonial regime by local right-wing parties of feudal landlords that were set up during this period in the different provinces of the country, for example the Union Party in the Punjab and the Justice Party in Madras.

The British strove to counterpose a front of reactionary parties and organisations to the national opposition.

This consolidation of the position enjoyed by the British imperialists within the country was facilitated by a conciliatory mood in bourgeois-landlord circles that supported the National Congress. This latter tendency was promoted in its turn by the situation that had taken shape by the mid-twenties, which was relatively favourable for the further development of large-scale Indian enterprise.

### Struggle Within the Congress. Swarajists

This period when the mass movement went into decline after the national forces had retreated in 1922 was a time for analysis of political experience gained by those taking part in the struggle during

the years of intense revolutionary activity. Within the Congress fierce discussion was now underway as to what kind of tactics should now be adopted in the new internal political situation.

The National Congress as an organisation was undergoing a profound crisis: in 1921-1923 its membership had dropped from ten million to a few hundred thousand. The withdrawal of the masses could be explained in the light of the temporary defeat of the freedom movement. The Congress' prestige as leader of the struggle had dropped considerably after the leadership's adoption of the Bardoli Resolution.

Differences within the National Congress in connection with possible changes in methods of struggle for the attainment of *Swaraj* and the leadership of the mass movement led to the emergence of two main factions within the party. The first of these consisted of the so-called status quo groups, Gandhi's supporters. In the new conditions that had taken shape the national leader temporarily renounced the well-tried tactics of *satyagraha* on a mass scale, putting forward instead a so-called constructive programme.

The main forms of activity engaged in by Gandhi and his supporters at this stage were: encouragement of handicrafts, in particular hand-spinning, a struggle against "untouchability", in other words against the social and day-to-day discrimination against persons belonging to the castes of untouchables and the propagation of Hindu-Moslem unity. In his work to implement the "constructive programme" Gandhi undoubtedly had two main aims in mind: he sought to undermine the attempts by the British to split the national movement, to preserve the mass base of the Congress, primarily with the support of the middle strata of the urban population, the craftsmen and small traders.

In 1924 and 1925 Gandhi organised two *satyagraha* campaigns of very limited scope in the small town of Vaikom situated in the South Indian state of Travancore. They were aimed at putting a stop to certain of the religious and social restrictions to which members of the untouchable castes were subjected. In 1925 he set up the All-India Handloom Spinning Association which not only advocated *charka* (handloom) but also supplied spinners with raw materials and undertook to arrange for the sale of their output.

The second faction within the National Congress consisted of the so-called supporters of change, prominent among whom were one of the leaders of the bourgeois nationalists in the United Provinces, Motilal Nehru, and the leader of the Bengal Congress organisation, C.R. Das. This group opposed involvement of the masses in political struggle and held that *Swaraj* should be won from within, in that Congress members should gain control of the central and provincial legislatures. This led them to advocate that the Congress members should participate in the forthcoming elections to the legislative assemblies. The core of their programme had to a certain extent the imprint of fear of the mass struggle by the working people of India



which was becoming an independent and major factor in India's political development.

In March 1923 a meeting of members of this faction was held in Allahabad which proceeded to set up the Swarajya party within the National Congress. Members of this new party adopted a resolution calling for participation in the elections to the legislative councils, so that while working within them and using methods of parliamentary obstruction they might force the colonial administration to comply with the demands of the national movement.

While this meeting of the National Congress, held at the end of 1922 in the town of Gaya (Bihar) gave its support to the position maintained by Gandhi's supporters, at the special session in Delhi the following year another resolution was adopted, allowing the Swarajist members to put forward their nominees for elections.

As a result of this fierce struggle within the party, Gandhi had to make major concessions to the Swarajists, and in a special document (the Gandhi-C.R. Das agreement) he relinquished non-cooperation as the main form of activity of the Congress. This agreement was corroborated by resolutions adopted by the Congress session held in 1924 in the town of Belgaum (Bombay Presidency), then in the following year the work of the Swarajists was recognised as the main form of work for Congress members at the meeting held in Cawnpore. However the Swarajists did not succeed in wresting a single concession from the British administration while working in the legislative and consultative bodies. The failures of the Swarajists soon led to a decline of their influence in the bourgeois-landlord circles and at the elections of 1926 they were defeated.

Dissatisfaction at the passive tactics of the Swarajist leaders in the National Congress spread in broad circles of the national bourgeoisie (particularly among the petty and middle bourgeoisie) and in various groups within the National Congress. The resultant weakness of the Swarajists in these conditions gave rise to a regrouping of the forces within the party, and to a certain degree of consolidation within the party leadership, which at the end of this period (1923-1927) included the Swarajist group led by Chitta Ranjan Das and Motilal Nehru, and the Gandhi supporters (including Rajendra Prasad, the Patel brothers, Vittalabhai and Vallabhai, and others) led by Gandhi himself.

### **The Emergence of a Left Wing Within the Congress**

Wide discontent within the Congress at the position adopted by the leadership led to the emergence of a left section, which reflected first and foremost the interests of petty-bourgeois circles that had been supporting the Congress. It was precisely these social and class-based groupings which had suffered most from the economic and political

onslaught of the imperialists and for that reason had advocated a more active struggle against the colonial regime.

This trend was represented in the Congress mainly by the younger members whose main leaders and theoreticians were Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964) and Subhas Chandra Bose (1897-1945). Both men came from families belonging to the elite of Indian society and had received their education at leading British universities. At the beginning of the twenties both Nehru and Bose started playing an active part in the national movement as ardent followers of Gandhi.

The emergence of this left wing in the Congress and the inclusion of its representatives in the party leadership strengthened the Congress influence over the masses which undoubtedly helped the national bourgeoisie to remain at the helm of the national movement.

At the same time these changes within the National Congress reflected the profound changes in the political life of India, which took place between 1922 and 1927 and which could be summed up as a strengthening of the position enjoyed by the left forces in the country despite the temporary decline of the mass struggle.

As time went on the left forces, which were sensitive in their response to new revolutionary ideas and took into account the changes that had taken place in the socio-political situation in India itself, came to realise that it was essential to radicalise the Congress programme and intensify the work of Congress members among the masses. Lenin's teaching and the experience of the October Revolution and of socialist construction in the USSR helped to mould the views held by these forces. Jawaharlal Nehru's visit to the Soviet Union in 1927 made a deep impression on him (he went there as a young man together with his father Motilal Nehru).

However specific differences did emerge in the practical activities of these two young leaders. In the late twenties and early thirties Bose concentrated his efforts on the creation of youth organisations, above all student organisations, and the consolidation of his influence in the Bengal Congress organisation. Jawaharlal Nehru at this period was endeavouring to establish and extend the links between the Indian national movement on the one hand and progressive organisations and revolutionary movements abroad on the other. In 1927 he represented India at the Brussels Congress of Colonial Peoples at which the Anti-Imperialist League was set up. On his return to India Nehru embarked on wide-scale work to set up branches of the League in India itself.

At the end of 1927 the left wing within the National Congress became a good deal stronger than it had been in the past. The Madras session of the Congress adopted a resolution proposed by Jawaharlal Nehru stating that the main aim of the Indian national liberation movement was to attain *purna swaraj* (i.e. complete independence). The session also endorsed proposals for the establishment of ties with the Anti-Imperialist League. In 1928 Nehru and Bose were elected General Secretaries of the Congress.



### Revolutionary Groups in Exile

Contacts between the various centres of Indian revolutionaries in exile and the Soviet young republic, which had been established as early as 1918, paved the way for the spread of Marxist ideology among the national revolutionaries of that time. Indians who visited Soviet Russia between 1918 and 1922 were deeply impressed by their meetings with Lenin and other Soviet leaders and all that they saw in Moscow, Petrograd, Tashkent, Baku and other cities in the country. Although the Indian petty-bourgeois revolutionaries had only a very vague idea of the nature of the October Revolution and of the Bolshevik programme and tactics, nevertheless they saw Soviet Russia as their ally in the struggle against British colonialism. Links between Indian revolutionaries in exile and Moscow were maintained via the Kabul, and later Berlin centres.

Members of the delegation from the Indian Revolutionary Association and the "Provisional Government of India" in Kabul led by Barakatullah, M.P.B.T. Acharya and Abdul Rab, who had spent the spring of 1919 in Moscow and had a meeting with Lenin, stayed on in Soviet Russia for several months. Afterwards Barakatullah published a brochure in Persian entitled *Bolshevism and the Islamic Nations* (Tashkent, 1919) which was soon translated into other oriental languages. This brochure played an important part in spreading the truth in Soviet Central Asia, India and the countries of the Middle East about the Soviet nationalities policy.

On their return to Kabul at the end of 1919 Acharya and Abdul Rab provided considerable assistance to several groups of Indians to make their way from Afghanistan to Soviet Turkestan. In answer to the call from the All-India Khilafat Committee at the beginning of 1920, large groups of those involved in the movement—mainly nationalistically inclined Moslem youth—began to cross the Indian-Afghan border, in order later to make their way to Turkey and take part in the armed struggle against the imperialist powers and preserve the prerogatives of the Sultan (Caliph). At rallies and meetings organised by the Khilafat organisations a message from the Amir of Afghanistan was made public in which he supported the movement of the Muhajirs (refugees). The total number of Muhajirs who made their way from India to Afghanistan came to between thirty and fifty thousand and this migration caused considerable problems for the government of Afghanistan. By the end of that year the majority of the Muhajirs were obliged to return to India and only a relatively small group succeeded in making their way to the Middle East by a variety of routes.

In the wake of the propaganda work carried out among the most politically aware Muhajirs by members of the Kabul underground revolutionary association, first and foremost Acharya and Abdul Rab, three groups of Muhajirs, some two hundred in all, crossed the Soviet-Afghan border in the course of 1920. Approximately half their number returned to India soon afterwards, others were helped to make their way to Turkey via Transcaucasia, and about thirty stayed on in Tashkent which gave Acharya and Abdul Rab the opportunity to set up the Tashkent branch of the Indian Revolutionary Association. As a representative of this Association Acharya took part in the work of the Second Comintern Congress in the summer of 1920.

By this time another group of Indians, consisting mainly of soldiers, who had deserted from the British units stationed in Khorasan (Persia), settled in Baku, where a newspaper in Urdu was put out entitled *Azad Hindusthan Akhbar* (News from Free India). Indian delegates also participated in the work of the Congress of the Oppressed Peoples of the East that was held in Baku in September 1920.

Marxist views were gradually beginning to gain support among Indian revolutionaries. An important part in this work was played by Manabendra Nath Roy.

M.N. Roy who had taken part in the work of underground revolutionary organisations in India and was later in exile in Japan, the United States and Mexico, was to become one of the founders of the Communist Party of Mexico. In accordance with a mandate issued by that party he arrived in Moscow in 1920 via Berlin, as a delegate to the Second Comintern Congress. At that Congress he was elected to the Comintern Executive Committee, in which he worked between 1920 and 1927 as one of the leading members of the Eastern Bureau.

After the Congress completed its work Roy went to Tashkent, where he began to play an active role in the creation of the first group of Indian Communists in exile, officially set up as the Communist Party of India on October 17, 1920. Initially it consisted of no more than ten members, but in the course of 1921 its ranks were swelled by the coming of the Muhajirs. In the spring of 1921 they set up an Indian group at the Communist University for the Toilers of the East which had been instituted that same year under the auspices of the Comintern. During the work of the Second Comintern Congress Roy had brought together the émigré revolutionaries then in Moscow in a Provisional Revolutionary Committee of India in whose name he corresponded with revolutionaries inside India and beyond her borders.

The first secretary of the group was Mohammad Shafiq. Before he was elected, in May 1920 he had put out a single issue of a newspaper entitled *Zamindar* (meaning the "owner of the land", implying in this context the peasant) devised as a publication to spread the ideas held by the Indian Revolutionary Association.



After completing their studies in Tashkent and Moscow a number of former Muhajirs including Mohammad Shafiq, Firozuddin Mansoor, Abdul Majid, Rafiq Ahmed and Shaukat Usmani, returned to India and started taking part in the work of the Communist groups that had been set up there; others remained in exile working within various bodies attached to the Comintern or in other international revolutionary organisations.

Apart from Roy, another figure to play a prominent part in the organisation of Communist groups among Indians in exile was Abani Mukherji who came to the Second Comintern Congress as a representative of the Indian Independence Committee in Berlin.

Roy and Mukherji published during the twenties books, brochures and articles treating questions connected with the Indian national liberation movement, the economic and political situation within the country, which were then illegally brought into India and played an important part in introducing petty-bourgeois nationalists to Marxism and laying the foundations for the formation of an Indian Communist Party. They were signatories to the first *Manifesto to Indian Revolutionaries* that appeared in the British press in the summer of 1920. The manifesto laid out the tasks facing the national-revolutionaries in their transition to a position of proletarian internationalism and the preparation of a social revolution in India.

Roy's role at this initial stage of the Communist movement in India was a contradictory one. His sectarian stand in the evaluation of revolution in the countries of the East, that was reflected, for example, in his differences with Lenin on the national and colonial question as early as the Second Comintern Congress, and his rejection of any role for the national bourgeoisie in the freedom movement prevented the Communist groups in India that had started up in the twenties from achieving a correct political orientation and also hampered the formation of a common front of left forces within the Indian national movement. Roy's political errors eventually led him to deviate from the Communist line and in 1929 he was expelled from the Comintern Executive Committee.

Yet Roy's activity in propagating Marxist ideas in India and his contribution to the organisation of Indian Communists were of major significance. Roy and Mukherji, who had both come from the ranks of the national-revolutionaries, regarded the Indian underground revolutionary organisations and their émigré centres and also the left wing within the National Congress as reserves for the Communist movement in India. As a result they considered it their task to free the Indian petty-bourgeois youth from the influence of bourgeois ideology as soon as possible. It was to this end that Roy, Mukherji and the group of Communist émigrés under their leadership attempted to establish contacts with various political movements and organisations in India ranging from the leaders of the Swarajists to the leadership of the underground revolutionary organisations that launched a new wave of political action after 1922.

Roy and Mukherji drew up a more detailed *Manifesto* for the next meeting of the Indian National Congress that was held in Ahmadabad in December 1921, at which the Congress was called upon to organise the masses of workers and peasants. It was also stressed on that occasion that only if their demands were incorporated into the Congress programme would the Congress be able to assume effective leadership of the popular masses. The text of the *Manifesto* was duplicated and brought illegally into India by the Communist Nalini Gupta.

The fact that the revolutionary wing of the Indian national movement consisted of various organisations and groups, the predominance of petty-bourgeois ideology and the sectarian trends to be observed in the views of Roy and a number of other Indian Communists—all this hindered the unification of the left forces on a common political platform. This explains the failure to unite all the revolutionary forces in exile. This had been attempted by Virendranath Chattopadhyaya, leader of the Indian Independence Committee in Berlin, at a special meeting held in Moscow in 1921. After the failure of the Moscow talks between representatives of various groups of revolutionaries in exile Chattopadhyaya returned to Berlin and started making preparations for the convocation of a congress of the international Anti-Imperialist League of which he was to become one of the organisers and leaders.

In the early twenties the first Communist groups were set up in India itself.

### The Emergence of Communist Groups in India and the Founding of the Communist Party of India

After the Bardoli Resolution, which had been the signal for the revolutionary forces to retreat, there was disillusion with Gandhi as a political leader among the national-revolutionaries and the left members of the Congress, who had in the past taken an active part in the non-cooperation movement. Once again the underground started to become more active. It had united around the Hindustan Republican Association. The underground revolutionaries, particularly those in the Punjab, worked in close contact with the centre for revolutionaries in exile that had been re-established in Kabul in 1921 and had begun to function as a branch of the National Congress. That same year the colonial authorities discovered a new conspiracy that had been organised to prepare an armed uprising in the Punjab. At the same time more and more people including those from the ranks of the revolutionary youth were turning to Marxism.

The period 1917-1921 was a kind of a preparatory stage for the Communist movement in India: as a result of the propagation of



information about the October Revolution and the first steps undertaken by the young Soviet state, the activity of the Comintern and the group of Indian Communists in exile led by M. N. Roy and A. Mukherji the ground was now prepared for the appearance of the first Marxist circles.

Among the works published in India at that period that expounded the principles of scientific communism (in various forms and degrees of detail) most notable was a small book by Shripad Amrit Dange, a Bombay student, entitled *Gandhi versus Lenin* (1921). In this book, Dange, who had been an active participant in the non-cooperation movement, compared the methods of political struggle advocated by Lenin and Gandhi, criticising Gandhi's programme and tactics. In May 1922, S. A. Dange began to put out a weekly English-language newspaper entitled *Socialist*, which was India's first Marxist periodical. It gave detailed coverage of the works by Marx and Lenin, provided information on the October Revolution in Russia and discussed aspects of the national liberation movement in India. Dange's activity provided a rallying point for the various groups of revolutionary youth in Bombay. In September 1922 the *Socialist* put out an announcement on the formation of the Indian Labour Socialist Party of the Indian National Congress. The name of this Marxist group which counted among its members S. A. Dange, S. V. Ghate, K. N. Joglekar and R. S. Nimbkar shows that the emergence of a Marxist wing of the national movement at that period was viewed by Dange and his associates as the creation of a left faction within the Congress. In 1923 the Bombay group began putting out a monthly journal entitled *Socialist*.

Marxist groups also appeared in other large industrial centres. In 1922 Shaikat Usmani after returning from Moscow set up a Communist group in Benares. A Communist cell in Lahore also started work at this time under the leadership of Ghulam Hussain who maintained close links with Mohammad Ali (Sepassi) who had come to Kabul from Tashkent. The organ of the Lahore group was the Urdu-language newspaper *Inqilab* (Revolution) published by G. Hussain. The Calcutta group led by Muzaffar Ahmad also adopted a scientific-communist stand at this period; in 1923 Ahmad began putting out a Bengali newspaper entitled *Ganavani* (The Voice of the People). A Marxist group was set up in Madras under the leadership of Singaravelu Chettiar who started publishing the *Labour-Kisan Gazette* (Workers' and Peasants' Gazette) in 1923.

The first Marxist periodicals provided a source of collective propaganda and organisation. Also important in this respect was the underground distribution within India of the journals *Vanguard of Indian Independence* (1922-1924) and *Masses of India* (1925-1927).

Between 1923 and 1925 not only did existing Marxist groups grow in size, but new Marxist circles were set up, such as those in the industrial centres of Cawnpore and Karachi. Links were established between the various Marxist centres and letters were exchanged with

the groups of Indian Communists in exile. The main task facing the Marxist groups in India was the co-ordination of their activities and the formation of an all-India organisation.

In the context of a repressive colonial regime the scope for legal activities for Indian Communists was severely restricted. In 1922-1923 the authorities cooked up the Peshawar conspiracy cases against the Muhajirs recently returned to India, who had been taking part in the work of centres for revolutionaries in exile. In 1924 the first trial against Communists was held in Cawnpore, as a result of which leaders of Marxist groups including Shripad Dange, Muzaffar Ahmad and Shaikat Usmani were sentenced to terms of imprisonment. The Indian Communists were accused of working as "Bolshevik agents". Despite these repressive measures the British secret service was unable to wipe out the Communist movement in India; in 1924-1925 the Marxist groups, on the contrary, intensified their activity.

In September 1924 Satya Bhakta, a journalist from Cawnpore, announced the founding of a legal Indian Communist Party. Insofar as the party, as pointed out in the statement issued by its leaders, was not associated with the Comintern and other revolutionary centres abroad, the authorities were prepared to take a tolerant view of its actual founding. Although the party founded by Satya Bhakta did not come to provide a rallying point for Indian Communists, he continued to prepare for the uniting of various groups of Indian Marxists. An organisational committee for the preparation of the forthcoming unity conference was set up under the left Congress member Hasrat Mohani. As a result the first conference of Indian Communists was held in Cawnpore in 1925 (December 28-30) chaired by the Madras Communist M. Singaravelu Chettiar at which a resolution was adopted calling for the formation of a Communist Party of India with its headquarters in Bombay. The Central Executive Committee then elected, with J. P. Bagerhatta and S. V. Ghate as its secretaries, included representatives of all the main Communist groups in India.

Within the Communist Party differences soon emerged in relation to its links with the Comintern. Satya Bhakta urged that the Communist Party of India should retain its "national character" and not forge any ties with the Comintern. At the second conference of the Communist Party, held in Calcutta in 1926, this stand was not supported by the majority of delegates, and Satya Bhakta left the party to set up a National Communist Party of India that essentially constituted an organisation of revolutionary democrats.

Although the Communist Party of India did not at that time become a section of the Comintern, so as to retain its opportunities for legal work, its ties with the international revolutionary movement were nevertheless being consolidated. These closer links were promoted by its contacts with the Communist Party of Great Britain, which in accordance with a resolution of the Comintern Executive Committee had taken it upon itself to co-operate with Indian Communists. During



the period 1925-1928 delegations of British Communists visited India. The Communist Party of India set itself the goal of creating a mass-scale revolutionary organisation and an anti-imperialist alliance.

In 1924 the group of Indian Communists in exile under the leadership of M. N. Roy assumed the function of the CPI's Foreign Bureau, a point that was laid down in the party's constitution adopted at its third conference in Bombay in 1927.

The formation of the Communist Party of India marked a new stage in the communist movement in that country, which coincided with a new wave of economic struggles waged by the working class and the trade unions.

### **The Labour Movement in the Period 1923-1927. Workers' and Peasants' Parties**

The decline in the mass anti-imperialist struggle which had set in in 1922 made itself felt within the labour movement as well. In the years immediately following, there was a drop both in the number of strikes and also in the number of workers taking part in them. At the same time the strikes became better organised, lasted longer and proved more resolute. The strike campaign was particularly intensive in 1924 and 1925, when 8,700,000 and 12,500,000 working days were lost respectively (as opposed to 3,900,000 in 1922, one million in 1926 and two million in 1927). As a rule the strikes were defensive in character. They were aimed against cuts in wages, or any lengthening of the working day, etc. The largest undertakings by the working class in 1924 and 1925 were the general strikes organised by the Bombay textile workers, and the strikes by the railway-workers in 1926 and 1927. At this stage the Bombay proletariat was emerging as the vanguard of the Indian labour movement.

At a time when the entrepreneurs and the colonial administration that supported them were on the offensive and had introduced a special Factories Act in 1926 providing for government control over the activities of labour organisations, a large number of strikes ended in defeats for the workers. This can to a large extent be put down to the fact that the trade unions were led by national-reformists.

After the 1918-1922 upsurge in revolutionary activity the trade unions were growing and their organisations were becoming stronger. Admittedly, the growth of the labour movement resulted mainly from the new membership drawn from the white-collar and industrial workers of Bombay. In 1926 there were close on two hundred trade unions in India with a total membership of nearly 300,000. Of this, fifty-seven unions numbering 125,000 members altogether were affiliated to the All-India Trade Union Congress.

The emergence of the Communist movement in India introduced certain changes to the trade union movement: members of the early Communist groups began to play an active part in the organisation of strikes, in the leadership of local alliances between industrial and white-collar workers. This development was facilitated by the fact that many leaders of Communist cells (e.g., Muzaffar Ahmad, G. Hussain and leaders of the Bombay group) were already closely associated with the activities of the trade unions. After the Communist Party of India had been set up in 1925 the Communists' work within the trade unions grew from strength to strength.

Under the influence of Communists and other radical elements at the meetings of the All-India Trade Union Congress resolutions of a political character were adopted: in 1924 a resolution protesting at the use of the police to suppress workers' activities; in 1925 a resolution demanding that the franchise should be extended to the workers; in 1926 a resolution condemning the idea of untouchability and racial discrimination.

It was at this period that the struggle began between national-reformists on the one hand, and Communists and revolutionary democrats on the other for the leadership of the organised labour movement. The British Labour Party which had sent a number of delegations to India in the period 1925-1927 also attempted to bring its influence to bear upon the Indian trade unions.

A struggle between the various political forces took place during the eighth session of the All-India Trade Union Congress held in Cawnpore in 1927. At the meeting a proposal put forward by the General Council of the British Trade Union Congress to admit the AITUC to the Amsterdam International of the "Yellow" Trade Unions was rejected. At the same time the meeting also rejected the proposal put forward by the left wing for joining the Profintern and the Anti-Imperialist League. Although national-reformists still constituted the majority in the leadership of the Executive Committee of the All-India Trade Union Congress, some posts in that Committee were held by Communists: D. R. Thengadi, chairman of the Bombay Workers' and Peasants' Party, was elected vice-chairman of the Congress and Dange assistant to the Secretary General.

The activities of the workers' and peasants' parties that had been founded by Communists served to consolidate the strength of the latter in the labour movement.

The first unsuccessful attempt to set up a mass-scale legal organisation of working people—a workers' and peasants' party—under Communist leadership was made as early as 1923 by Singaravelu Chettiar in Madras. In the years 1926-1928 workers' and peasants' parties were set up first in Bengal and then in the Bombay Province, the Punjab and the United Provinces. The leadership of these organisations was assumed by revolutionary democrats as well as Communists.

At that period the workers' and peasants' parties provided the



most important channel for Communist influence over the working class, the peasantry and the urban middle strata. Under their leadership a number of workers' trade unions and the *Kisan Sabha* (peasants' organisations) that started to spring up in the early thirties gained ground.

The parties defended the interests of the working class and the peasantry and came out in favour of the abolition of the *zamindari* land system and for full independence. Publication of the programmes of these workers' and peasants' parties and their appeal to the National Congress gave rise to the crystallisation of a left wing within the Congress. The various newspapers published by these parties played an important part in their propaganda activity: *Ganavani* (Voice of the People) in Bengal, *Kranti* (Revolution) in Bombay, *Kirti* (The Worker), *Mehnatkash* (The Working Man), *Mazdur-Kisan* (The Worker and the Peasant) in the Punjab.

The work of the Communists and the workers' and peasants' parties helped promote the preconditions vital for the onset of a new upsurge in the liberation movement.

Growing tension in the internal political situation began at the end of 1927, when the British government declared that it was going to appoint a commission under Lord Simon to draw up proposals for a new Act concerning the government of India. Wide indignation was aroused by the fact that no representatives of the Indian public were included in the commission. The Madras session of the Congress adopted a resolution to boycott the Simon Commission. The campaign of protest against British colonial policy now began to spread throughout the country.

## THE RISE OF THE ANTI-IMPERIALIST MOVEMENT AND THE STRUGGLE FOR A UNITED FRONT (1928-1939)

The economic and socio-political factors which gave rise to the revolutionary upswing in India in the period 1918-1922 still remained. The imperialist counter-offensive in the years that followed served to exacerbate the contradictions between the colonial regime and the various classes of Indian society.

The further growth of national capitalism in these circumstances led to still deeper contradictions between the British monopolies and the Indian national bourgeoisie.

### A NEW CHAPTER IN THE NATIONAL LIBERATION STRUGGLE

#### The Impact of the World Economic Crisis on the Economic Position in India

The world economic crisis of 1929 dealt a severe blow to the economy of India. The agrarian crisis—a crisis affecting the sale of agricultural produce—had begun earlier, still back in 1927-1928. The fall in prices for the main types of agricultural commodity production was substantial: for example, wheat prices dropped by 50 per cent and those for jute between 50 and 65 per cent. At the same time the colonial authorities were reviewing rates of land taxation with a view to making them considerably higher. This meant that the real income received by those who tilled the land had dropped considerably. To offset losses resulting from the unfavourable market situation, landlords began substituting rent in cash for rent in kind. More and more tenant farmers and owners of small holdings were finding themselves bankrupt. More and more land formerly owned by peasants was making its way into the hands of the landlords, money-lenders and more prosperous peasants. The total amount of agricultural indebtedness reached nine thousand million rupees.

Apart from these blows dealt to the villages the crisis was also hitting the towns. Factories and small-scale industrial enterprises were being closed down. Mass dismissals of workers under the pretext of rationalisation schemes at a time of rising prices led to a



deterioration in the position of the working class and the poorer categories of white-collar workers.

The British bourgeoisie endeavoured to extricate itself from this economic crisis at the expense of its colonies, and first and foremost that of India. At that period the gulf between prices for Indian exports and imports, above all British ones, was growing considerably.

At a time when the cost of living was rising and large numbers of small-scale producers were being ruined, many Indians were compelled to start using up their savings (in keeping with local traditions these would be in the form of silver and gold jewellery). The British banks working through their money-lender agents succeeded in pumping out of India close on three thousand million rupees' worth of precious metals in those crisis years.

The crisis did not affect the position of the working people alone. Small and medium-scale industrial and commercial enterprises started going bankrupt all over the country. Only the upper echelons of the Indian bourgeoisie were able to retain their economic position, apart of course from the foreign monopolies. However the growing strength of the upper strata of the Indian entrepreneurs in the context of the colonial regime also gave rise to more serious clashes between the interests of the former and the imperialists.

Thus the economic crisis that seriously intensified the class and national contradictions in India also gave a new momentum to the class struggle as well as the national liberation struggle in the country.

### **The Labour Movement: 1928-1929**

The new wave of revolutionary activity in the country began with the struggles waged by the working class. The strike movement intensified: over five hundred thousand people took part in strikes in 1928. The strikes of the late twenties and early thirties were characterised by several new features that had been absent from the economic struggle of the labour movement in the ten previous years.

Picketing and the formation of strike committees were two forms of action that now came to be used more and more frequently. Within the organised labour movement an increasingly tense struggle was building up between the Communists, and the democrats who aligned to them, on the one hand, and the national-reformists on the other, as each side strove to assume the leadership of the trade unions and the strike committees.

As a result of this struggle revolutionary trade unions were set up which engaged simultaneously in both economic and political struggle and consistently defended the class interests of the workers.

The first trade union of this type was set up in Bombay while preparations were being made for a general strike of the textile workers. This trade union, known as the Girni Kamgar Union of Textile Workers and led by Dange and Ben Bradley, a British Communist working in India, later became the core of the left trade union movement in the country.

The strike which began after a mass lockout at the Bombay textile factories, when several thousand workers were sacked, lasted for a long period and involved all the textile workers of Bombay. Over twenty million working days were lost during six months (the strike lasted from April to October 1928). The persistence of the striking workers exerted considerable influence on the whole of the Indian labour movement. Workers of Sholapur and other industrial centres, and the railway workers came out in support of their fellow-workers. Special funds for the strikers were collected in India and also in Britain and the Soviet Union.

Despite the repressive measures instigated against the organisers of the strike and attempts to undermine the strikers' resistance with the help of strike-breakers and other such methods, the entrepreneurs and the colonial authorities were at last obliged to make concessions. A special committee was set up to review the economic demands put forward by the strikers (an end to wage-cuts and dismissals, and also to discrimination against the untouchables); the Girni Kamgar Union was officially recognised as the trade union representing the Bombay textile workers and the leaders of the strike committee were no longer prosecuted by the police.

The general strike of the Bombay textile workers was an illustrious page in the history of the Indian labour movement. It gave a revolutionary charge to the next stage of activities organised by the Indian working class.

The setting up of the Girni Kamgar trade union and its early success accelerated the formation of a left wing in the All-India Trade Union Congress, in which at that period the Communists were playing an increasingly prominent part.

At the conference of the All-India Trade Union Congress in Jharia (Bengal) in 1928 resolutions were passed calling for the establishment of an independent socialist republic of India, in which land and industry would be nationalised. This move reflected the substantial radicalisation of the political programme of the trade union movement that had by this time taken place.

The reaction of the Labour Party, which came into power in Britain in 1929, to this consolidation of the left forces in the trade union organisations in India was twofold: on the one hand it made a number of gestures of understanding towards the working class of India, such as appointing a Royal Commission on Labour in India (under Wheatley), while on the other it continued the existing policy of cruel suppression of the organised labour movement.



Laws were passed prohibiting the setting-up of working-class political organisations and confining the activities of the trade unions to purely economic issues, at the same time persecution of Communist activities was stepped up.

Members of factory committees supporting the left trade unions were subjected to harassment. The Bombay textile workers rallied to the support of Girni Kamgar by organising another general strike in March 1929. However this time the strike ended in a failure as the main leaders of the left wing in the trade unions were arrested.

The growing influence of Communists and left Congress members in the trade union movement seriously alarmed the bourgeois nationalists. At the tenth conference (Nagpur—November 1929) the right wing of the All-India Trade Union Congress attempted to block the enrolment of the trade union organisation Girni Kamgar in the Congress. Finding themselves in the minority the right-wing trade unionists left the All-India Trade Union Congress and in December of that year they set up a new trade union centre called the Indian Trade Unions Federation led by V. V. Giri and N. M. Joshi. This was how the first split in what had hitherto been the united Indian trade union movement took place.

The Nagpur conference passed a resolution calling for a boycott of the Wheatley Commission. Subhas Chandra Bose was elected chairman of the All-India Trade Union Congress. The course which events had taken in the Indian labour movement showed that there now existed favourable conditions in which the Communists and the revolutionary democrats aligned to them could collaborate with the left wing of the Congress. However these opportunities were not exploited, a fact that can in part be attributed to the position adopted by the Communists themselves.

### The Situation in the Communist Movement

In the late twenties and early thirties the main arena of communist activity was provided by the trade unions, in which definite successes were scored. The second sphere where the CPI could extend its mass following was provided by the workers' and peasants' parties. As the labour movement gained ground so the activity of these parties also intensified.

In December 1928 the first conference of the All-India Workers' and Peasants' Party was held bringing together all the organisations that went by this title in the country's provinces.

Resolutions were passed at this conference calling for the attainment of India's complete independence that necessitated the assumption of a leading role in the national liberation movement by the working class. The conference stressed the importance of intensifying the class struggle waged by the workers and peasants.

Communists enjoyed the greatest influence among the workers and students of Bengal, the Punjab and Bombay. Youth organisations were set up such as the Naujawan Bharat Sabha (Young India League).

In their efforts to hold back the growth of communist influence in the mass organisations the colonial administration dealt a major blow at the leadership of the left forces in March 1929. Thirty-three left leaders, including fourteen Communists, among whom were the leaders of the CPI, and eighteen trade union leaders were arrested and accused of conspiring against the British Crown. The Meerut Conspiracy Case (named after the town in which the case was tried) which lasted for four years was made skilful use of by the Communists as a tribune from which they denounced British colonial policy in India and also propagated the ideas of scientific socialism. Support was given to the accused by broad sections of the Indian public, including the leaders of the National Congress. Special committees for their defence were set up both in India and abroad.

A severe setback to the Communist movement resulted from the sectarian stand adopted by those leaders of the Party who had not been arrested. In December 1930 the Comintern publication *International Press Correspondence* carried a "Draft Platform of Action of the CPI" which advocated what, in the Indian context of that period, amounted to a left-sectarian call for the implementation of socialist revolution by means of armed uprising and the establishment of Soviet power. In keeping with these proposals the CPI did not participate in the mass movement in 1931-1932 which was being organised throughout the country by the National Congress.

The rout of the revolutionary nucleus of the trade unions, their split and the left-sectarian position adopted by the Communists all affected the struggle of the working class. The strike movement, despite the mounting tide of revolutionary activity, nevertheless did not achieve the heights it had reached in 1927-1929.

The largest strike in the period 1930-1933 was that of the workers and white-collar staff employed by the Great Indian Peninsular Railway, involving more than eighty thousand people. This struggle waged by the railway workers, who together with the textile workers made up the militant vanguard of the working class, was outstanding for its resolute stand. Despite the conciliatory position adopted by the trade union leadership, mass lock-outs, the use of troops, the strike lasted for almost a year and was supported by the workers and white-collar staff of other railways.

The organised labour movement however was again weakened in view of the second split within the trade union centre. At the next conference of the All-India Trade Union Congress (Calcutta—1931) the left wing led by the Communists announced that it was leaving the organisation. The reason for this was the sharp differences between the majority of the leaders and the Communists on the question as to whether or not the representatives of the Communist



railway workers should be regarded as full-fledged members of the Trade Union Congress. A new nation-wide trade union organisation was set up called the Red Trade Union Centre which was affiliated to the Profintern.

The errors of the Indian Communists were set right with the help of the Comintern and the fraternal Communist Parties. In June 1932 in Comintern publications there appeared an "Open Letter to the Communists of India" drawn up by the Communist Parties of Germany, Great Britain and China, in which were discussed the erroneous slant of the left-sectarian principles of the CPI and recommendations were made to the effect that the Indian Communists should take part in the nation-wide movement led by the Congress, working within that context for the establishment of a united anti-imperialist front.

The publication of that document had a positive influence upon the situation within the Communist movement in India some of whose leaders, then still in prison (in connection with the Meerut trial), had not adopted a left-sectarian stand.

In December 1933 an All-India Party Conference was held in Calcutta which elected a new Central Committee headed by General Secretary Adhikari. The CPI now became affiliated to the Comintern and it began to take an active part in the nation-wide movement. However these developments took place only after the wave of revolutionary activity had started to subside.

The wide-scale activities of the working class in 1928 and 1929 served to galvanise the entire of Indian political life.

#### **Preparations for a New Government of India Act. The Stand Adopted by the National Congress**

A new wave of mass anti-imperialist demonstrations was triggered off by the arrival in India of the Simon Commission on February 3, 1928, which had been appointed to draw up a new act for the administration of India. *Hartals* calling for Simon to leave India were organised by the National Congress and the All-India Trade Union Congress. Protest against the British government's deliberate passing over of Indian public opinion while preparing this new act was voiced not only by the National Congress and the democratic organisations—the workers' and peasants' parties and the trade unions—but also by the Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha. Only the reactionary landlord parties co-operated with the Simon Commission.

The boycott called for by Indian political organisations was supported by a majority within the Central Legislative Assembly.

On the initiative of the Indian National Congress inter-party conferences were held in 1928 at which the principles of state and

political organisation for India were discussed on the basis of the country being granted dominion status.

Apart from the organisation of a nation-wide boycott of the Simon Commission and the preparation of its own draft for the Constitution of India, the National Congress was taking steps to broaden its mass support. Branches of the National Congress were set up in a number of rural localities bringing together in the main the more prosperous sections of the peasantry.

An important contributory factor to the re-enhancement of the Congress prestige and that enjoyed by Gandhi himself was the *satyagraha* led by Gandhi and Vallabhai Patel rallying the landowning peasants to refuse to pay their taxes in the Bardoli district of Gujarat. This move was in protest at the considerable rise in taxes. In support of the peasants who stood firm in spite of police repression and confiscation of their lands the National Congress organised a nation-wide Bardoli Day on June 12, 1928, when mass rallies and solidarity demonstrations were held all over the country.

The partial success of this *satyagraha* and the considerable space devoted to it in the national press consolidated to a considerable extent the influence and popularity enjoyed by Gandhi and the Congress leaders.

Meanwhile in July 1928 the report of the Committee chaired by Motilal Nehru was published. It contained a draft Constitution of India that came to be known as the Nehru Constitution. It stipulated that India was to be granted Dominion status and that elected bodies have control of the budget, while Britain would continue to run foreign policy and defence matters. The Nehru Constitution contained provisions in support of the princes' rights while at the same time ignoring the vital demands of the working people throughout the country.

The extreme moderation of the programme elaborated by the Committee met with harsh criticism when the Nehru Constitution was discussed in local branches of the party. The reaction of the left wing of the National Congress to the proposals of the Nehru Committee was to organise independence leagues all over the country which began to agitate for India's attainment of *purna swaraj* (complete independence). In November 1928 a session of the All-India Independence League was held, under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose.

The Nehru Constitution was ignored by the Simon Commission, and thus the hopes entertained by the moderate leaders in the National Congress of achieving certain concessions from the British by constitutional means were dashed. This served to strengthen still further the position of the left wing in the Congress, which through the local independence leagues in the various parts of the country was agitating both inside the party and outside for *purna swaraj*. However there was still a majority of leaders within the Congress, including Gandhi himself, who were not as yet ready to accept the demands put



forward by the left wing. At the next session of the National Congress towards the close of 1928 in Calcutta the report of the Committee chaired by Motilal Nehru was ratified and the decision as to whether or not to start a new non-cooperation movement was postponed for a year.

#### **Activities of Underground Revolutionaries. Crisis of the Terrorist Organisations**

The prevalence of democratic aspirations in the country as a whole by this time and the resolute activities of the working class prompted renewed activity on the part of the underground revolutionary organisations. Although the first youth and student organisations had been set up by Communists and Congress members in the late twenties and early thirties a certain section of the radical youth (mainly of petty-bourgeois origin) was not satisfied by the methods of work employed by either of these two groups. It should also be pointed out that at that time the Communists had not yet made a major impact on Indian society. Most of the Indian youth were thirsting for immediate action and following traditional methods of underground struggle.

In 1928 the Indian Republican Socialist Association was set up under the leadership of the ardent revolutionary Bhagat Singh bringing together the disparate terrorist organisations. Branches were set up in the Punjab, Rajputana, the United Provinces and Bihar, in other words throughout almost the whole of North-Western and Northern India. A large underground organisation was also active in Bengal, where many terrorists were members of the local Congress organisation.

The most active of these branches was the organisation in the Punjab which drew its support from the local Naujawan Bharat Sabha that had been set up in 1925 by Bhagat Singh. In Lahore the terrorists set up underground bomb production.

The underground revolutionaries were convinced that large-scale terrorist activity would provide the necessary stimulus for mass-scale peasant activity. They held that the overthrow of the colonial regime in India would take place under pressure from a spontaneously evolving peasant revolution, and they underestimated the role of the working class and the work of the mass organisations of the working people.

In keeping with their pre-arranged plan of action the leaders of the Republican Association Bhagat Singh and Batukeswar Dutt broke into the building of the Central Legislative Assembly on April 8, 1929 and after exploding bombs there allowed themselves deliberately to be placed under arrest. The British police succeeded in destroying the Association's headquarters and unearthing the underground bomb factory. Singh and Dutt were arrested on charges of "conspiracy in

Lahore". The heroic figures of Bhagat Singh and his comrades-in-arms aroused profound sympathy among the Indian nationalists. Protest rallies and demonstrations were held throughout the country in defence of the prisoners who started a hunger strike in prison.

However the terrorist activities undertaken by the Indian underground revolutionaries did not of course lead to any mass action against the colonial regime. Unsuccessful action on the part of the terrorists gave rise to a profound crisis within the whole of the movement. While in prison Bhagat Singh and other leaders of the underground organisations reviewed many of their ideas. The majority of them now adopted a Marxist-Leninist stand and joined the Communist Party of India. The last book which Bhagat Singh read before his execution was Lenin's biography. He found in himself sufficient political courage to acknowledge the mistaken principles underlying individual terror and in his letter to Indian revolutionaries written from prison he called upon them to link their destiny with the struggle of the working class.

By the beginning of the 1930s the terrorist movement rapidly disappeared from the political arena as an independent force within the Indian national movement.

At the same time the heroic action of the underground revolutionaries undertaken against a background of mass anti-imperialist activity served to promote the spread of a revolutionary mood throughout the country.

#### **The Second Non-Cooperation Campaign. The Movement Develops into an Uprising**

The rapid increase in social tension in the country created conditions favourable to the organisation of mass political campaigns. Gandhi held that the situation was now ripe for bringing pressure to bear on the colonial government. At the Lahore session of the National Congress (December 1929), presided over by Jawaharlal Nehru, a resolution was adopted calling for the organisation of a new non-cooperation movement. Its leader as on the previous occasion was Gandhi.

In view of the dominant mood in the country at that time and in response to the pressure from the left wing of the national movement the meeting accepted a new interpretation of the ultimate goal of the national struggle as the attainment of complete independence.

In accordance with a resolution passed by the National Congress, on January 26, 1930 Independence Day was celebrated throughout the country. The organisers expected that the degree of participation by patriotic forces in the demonstrations organised by the Congress would provide an adequate indicator of the country's preparedness for a new campaign of civil non-cooperation.



In January of that year Gandhi had published his famous eleven points in the newspaper he edited, *Young India*, which covered the demands he made on the British authorities calling for a change in their economic policy in the interests of the Indian bourgeoisie and also for the release of political prisoners who had not been accused of violent activities (this move showed that Gandhi was not going to stand up for the terrorists also languishing in prison at that time).

After Viceroy Irwin rejected Gandhi's proposals, the latter announced a new non-cooperation campaign in April 1930. It followed approximately the same programme as the one held in the early twenties. A new demand incorporated on this occasion was for the revocation of the state salt monopoly. Although in itself this measure would not lead to any radical change, nevertheless it immediately enhanced the campaign's popularity and that of its organisers among wide sections of the Indian population.

In March of that year Gandhi left his headquarters in Ahmadabad—the Satyagraha-ashram—with seventy-eight of his supporters and set off on a propaganda campaign through Gujarat to the small town of Dandi on the shore of the Arabian Sea, where he intended to defy the official salt monopoly by making salt from sea-water by evaporation.

This journey, which received wide coverage in the Indian press, took two weeks and did a great deal to promote the ideas of *satyagraha*. The non-cooperation movement was now gaining ground throughout India and the colonialists decided to launch a counter-offensive.

The British authorities first banned the non-cooperation movement and declared the National Congress and other national organisations illegal and then began mass-scale arrests. In May Gandhi himself was arrested. By the end of 1930 close on sixty thousand people had been sentenced.

However these repressive measures could not put a halt to the work of the freedom movement: its activities reached a climax in the spring when they took the form of an armed uprising.

Large-scale armed action took place in three towns—Peshawar, Chittagong and Sholapur. The fact that armed struggle broke out in these particular centres was no chance occurrence. These three towns were situated in the three regions where the national liberation movement had attained its highest level in the first three decades of the twentieth century, namely North-West India, Bengal and Maharashtra.

The arrest of the leaders of the non-cooperation movement in Peshawar in April provoked widespread discontent in the town which soon built up into barricade fighting. Peasants from the local Pathan villages came to the help of the townspeople of Peshawar, the centre of the North-West Frontier Province. Trading in the town came to a standstill. The British were obliged to take refuge in the town citadel.

The situation was further complicated by the fact that the soldiers of the Garhwal regiment refused to open fire and began to fraternise with the insurgents. The British commanders of the local garrison prevented the Indian soldiers from going over to the side of the townspeople by disarming the regiment and removing all troops from the town for a fortnight.

Detachments of insurgent Pathan tribesmen (Momands and Afridies) rallied to the assistance of Peshawar. However after intervention on the part of the Congress leaders who appealed to them to refrain from violence they returned to the mountains. Although the British troops entered Peshawar on May 4, it was not until the middle of the month that they succeeded in establishing complete control over the town once more.

The Peshawar uprising gave the signal for mass anti-British demonstrations by the Pathan peasants. It was here that the organisation Pashto-Jirgah (Afghan Council) came into its own, rallying together the various detachments of Red-Shirts. The Pathan rebels were led by Gandhi's follower Abdul Gaffar Khan.

By the end of 1930 the whole of the frontier province had taken up arms. The Red-Shirts, who supported the cause of the Afridies and Momands tribesmen, skilfully waged guerilla warfare in this region to which the main forces of the Anglo-Indian army were drawn. Hostilities continued into the following year and the number of Red-Shirts grew in the course of the year from eighty thousand to three hundred thousand.

At the other, Eastern border of the country an uprising in Chittagong broke out almost simultaneously with that in Peshawar. Unlike the Peshawar action it had been planned in advance.

The uprising was led by the local underground organisation, the Republican Army of Chittagong, under Ambica Chakrawarty and Surjai Sen.

Taking into account the lessons gained from the sad experience of the Lahore terrorist organisation Chakrawarty and Sen prepared armed detachments of patriotic youths. The uprising began on April 18, when the arsenal, the barracks and the railway station were raided. For ten days the town was in the hands of the insurgents. However the British, after rallying their forces together in the port, made contact with Calcutta and called for reinforcements from the provincial capital. Still in military formation the insurgents left the town; they entrenched themselves on a hill overlooking the town and manned a defensive encampment for some time before the uprising was eventually suppressed.

The third of these armed uprisings took place in Sholapur, where on May 5 after armed police provocation barricade fighting began, which soon developed into a large-scale uprising. The insurgents burnt down buildings of the colonial administration and laid siege to the railway station, where British officials were taking refuge. Street battles continued for several days. The town was soon in the hands of



revolutionary councils. It was only after the leaders of the uprising were arrested on May 16 that it was suppressed.

In contrast to Peshawar and Chittagong, where the petty-bourgeois youth was the most active force in the movement, the chief force behind the rising in Sholapur were the workers.

Despite the fact that all these uprisings ended in defeat (as a result of their localised and largely spontaneous character, and also the numerically superior forces of the British regime) they exerted a considerable influence on the internal political situation, fanning the revolutionary aspirations of the people.

During 1930-1931 political strikes were organised in many large centres such as Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, Delhi and Karachi.

### **The Peasant Movement. Uprisings in the Princely States**

The revolutionary movement now began to spread to the villages and the principalities. The Bardoli *satyagraha* had been a starting-point for subsequent work by the National Congress in rural areas. In 1929 the Congress organisations started setting up peasant unions in a number of regions, in particular in the United Provinces. Their main aim was to draw the peasantry into the civil disobedience movement. The organisers of this work strove to confine the peasants' struggle within the framework of anti-imperialist objectives while attempting to play down class conflict and opposition to feudal lords in the villages.

The National Congress scored its biggest successes in Oudh, where a campaign to bring down both land rent and land taxes paid to the treasury by the *zamindars* was organised by Jawaharlal Nehru.

However like the Congress members active in the United Provinces the Communists and revolutionary democrats also started working among the peasants there.

During 1931 and 1933 organised peasant movement in the United Provinces, the Punjab, Bihar, Bengal, the Carnatic and Andhra took the form mainly of propaganda work led by the *Kisan Sabha* advocating that the local population refuse to pay taxes. The strongest peasant movement was that in the United Provinces where the civil non-cooperation movement in the rural areas, particularly those in the district of Allahabad, developed into armed action by peasant detachments.

In the period 1929 to 1933 the peasant movement became more organised. In most provinces local peasant unions were set up which embraced for the most part the more prosperous or middle strata of the peasantry. In a number of districts, particularly those in the United Provinces and Bihar, the peasant unions were very much under the influence of the Communists and petty-bourgeois revolu-

tionary democrats, who were now challenging the Congress in their efforts to assume the leadership of the peasant movement.

The development of the national liberation movement in British India also affected the internal situation in the princely states. In 1931-1933 a liberation struggle was launched in some of these states which soon developed into armed uprisings.

Events took a particularly dramatic course in Kashmir where, though the majority of the population were Moslems, power was concentrated in the hands of the ruler and his entourage, who were Rajputs by caste, Dogras by nationality and Hindus by religion. Feudal oppression in Kashmir was exacerbated by religious, ethnic and caste discrimination to which the Kashmiris were subjected. The absolute power of the prince and the arbitrary rule of the Dogra feudal lords were encouraged by the British colonial regime represented there by the British Resident.

Broad sections of the peasants and artisans came out against the ruling feudal clique, and likewise the Kashmiri bourgeoisie and the bourgeois intelligentsia.

The anti-feudal movement in Kashmir began in the summer of 1931 with the spontaneous action on the part of the peasants, who after setting up fighting detachments laid siege to the capital of the state Srinagar. In the town itself the artisans and traders started anti-government demonstrations.

The local national bourgeoisie, which represented the traders and owners of small-scale industrial enterprises, set up an organisation to promote the enlightenment of the local people known as the Readers' Party, which in August of that year published a manifesto demanding an end to discrimination on ethnic or religious grounds and the introduction of certain bourgeois-democratic freedoms.

The British brought troops into Kashmir and succeeded in provoking clashes between the Hindus and the Moslems. The hostilities between the two religious communities in Kashmir had an adverse effect on relations between the Hindus and the Moslems in the rest of India.

However the British were not able to suppress the peasant action completely. They were compelled to appoint a special commission to investigate the situation, which recommended to the administration in the principality that the basic demands of the Readers' Party be granted.

Since the Maharaja of Kashmir was not willing to implement the recommendations of the commission, events began to take a dangerous turn once more at the beginning of 1932. A Political Conference of Jammu and Kashmir, more democratic than its predecessor, was set up on the basis of the Readers' Party. It published a programme incorporating not only the demands put forward before but also some new ones including those for the curtailment of the Maharaja's despotic powers, a reduction of land taxes, and a cancellation of tax arrears, etc.



The conference began its activities by launching a campaign to persuade the local population to refuse to pay land taxes. However the uprising was put down at the end of 1932 with the help of British troops. The prince, nevertheless, was compelled to convene a legislative assembly in 1934, and make concessions to the local national bourgeoisie.

In the middle of 1932 an uprising began in Alwar—one of the principalities of Rajputana. There, as in Kashmir, the anti-feudal struggle took a religious and communal form. The ruler of the principality, the landowners and also the peasants in the southern part of the territory were Hindus by faith, while the peasants in the north were Moslems. The latter put forward a demand not only for a curtailment of feudal exploitation but also for an end to religious discrimination. This latter demand was supported by the Moslem intelligentsia and the lesser feudal lords of Moslem faith who succeeded in lending the movement a religious character.

At the end of 1932 the peasants had mustered an army of thirty thousand men. After capturing several towns in the north of the principality they approached the city of Alwar. Gradually the peasant movement became more consistent in the protection of its class interests, for the insurgents started to attack the estates of Moslem *zamindars*. It was in this situation that the Muslim League called for British troops to be sent to the principality "to protect the Moslems of Alwar". The Hindu Maha Sabha also was in favour of British intervention, but, of course, to "defend the interests of the Hindus in the principality". On its initiative the Day of Alwar was observed throughout the country which also served to fan hostility between the two main religious communities.

Despite the heroic resistance put up by the insurgents the uprising was put down at the end of 1933.

Anti-feudal action also took place in 1932-1933 in the small feudal territories of Pulra and Dir settled by the Pushto tribes.

These uprisings in the princely states were a direct consequence of the spread of the freedom movement to all parts of India.

#### **British Policy and the Change in the Position Adopted by the Congress**

Apart from direct suppression of the national movement the British colonialists also began political manoeuvring aimed at dividing the camp of the regime's opponents.

In June 1930 the report of the Simon Commission was published, containing recommendations with regard to India's future constitutional structure. No space in the report was devoted to the basic demands voiced by the Indian national movement. Instead the Viceroy's power was to be preserved intact. Division of the electors into electoral colleges was carried one stage further: another of these

was set up to cover the untouchables. Provisions were also made for strengthening the influence of the princes' nominees in the central legislature. It is clear that once more the colonialists were staking their hopes on a further split in the national forces in view of religious and caste factors, on the consolidation of the influence of conservative, feudal social groupings.

Meanwhile some minor concessions were made to India's property classes: the suffrage was extended and Sind was made a separate province in accordance with the demands put forward by the Muslim League. Burma was separated from India at this stage when a peasant uprising was raging. The colonialists were anxious to isolate the Burmese national movement from that of India.

As early as 1929 the British government had suggested that representatives of the various Indian political parties should assemble for a Round Table Conference in order to discuss the report of the Simon Commission. The National Congress which did not view positively the report of the Commission rejected this proposal. The first Round Table Conference opened in London on November 12, 1930 and India was represented by various princes, the Muslim League, the Hindu Maha Sabha, the Liberal Federation and the Federation of the Untouchables set up by B. R. Ambedkar.

The British who had skilfully fanned hostilities between representatives of the various religious communities of India virtually brought the conference to its knees.

At the same time the British administration, in a conciliatory gesture towards the national bourgeoisie, introduced several changes in its tariff policy. Negotiations were opened with Gandhi, who was still in prison at that time but was later released in 1931.

On March 5, 1931 an agreement was reached between the leadership of the National Congress and the Viceroy's administration (the Gandhi-Irwin Pact), in keeping with which the British agreed to put an end to repressive measures and free political prisoners, but only those who had not been accused of acts of violence. The Congress publicly halted the civil non-cooperation campaign. Gandhi also agreed to take part in the work of the second Round Table Conference.

The Gandhi-Irwin Pact aroused sharp criticism not only in left circles within the Congress but also outside it. Some provincial Congress organisations (those of Bengal and the Punjab for example) refused to give him their support.

However at the next session of the National Congress in Karachi (March 1931) Gandhi's stand was approved. A temporary truce was reached between the leaders of the national movement and the colonial regime.

While preparing for the negotiations to be held with its main political opponent, the national bourgeoisie drew up an economic and social programme in Karachi which went further than the main tenets of the Nehru Constitution. They reaffirmed that the main aim of their



struggle was to attain *purna swaraj* (or "Congressist independence"); this phrase left room for various interpretations and could be taken to mean anything from complete independence to Dominion status. In the resolution on the platform for the negotiations at the Round Table Conference the demand was put forward that the Congress should be given control over matters of defence and foreign relations.

The document ratified at this session entitled *Fundamental Rights and Economic Programme* contained points on the introduction of bourgeois-democratic freedoms in India: equality in matters of caste and religion, the reorganisation of the administrative divisions in the country on the basis of language, etc. Plans were also made for the stipulation of a minimum wage, rent restrictions and tax cuts.

For the first time certain important demands made by the working people were taken into account in the formulation of the official document outlining the new programme of the Congress. The influence of the left forces in the Congress made itself felt in the other sections of the document as well, where reference was made to the need to nationalise the key branches of the country's industry. The proposal that protectionist tariffs should be introduced accorded with the interests of many Indian entrepreneurs.

Despite certain weaknesses in this Congress programme adopted at Karachi, it marked an important step towards the radicalisation of the party's activity, and the broadening of its popular base.

At almost the same time as the Congress session, a second conference of the All-India Workers' and Peasants' Party was held at which a programme for socio-economic change was put forward as an alternative to the Congress programme.

The resolutions adopted at this conference included demands for an eight-hour working day, paid holidays, recognition of the workers' right to strike and set up class-based trade unions; the aspirations of the peasants were reflected in calls for the elimination of large landed estates, the introduction of income tax, the revocation of *begar* (forced labour), rent cuts, the introduction of a moratorium with regard to rents and rent and tax arrears, and an end to caste discrimination. The ultimate goal of the liberation struggle was stated as being the attainment of complete independence and the implementation of far-reaching socio-economic reforms.

Also at this stage a congress of the youth organisation Naujawan Bharat Sabha was held and its members adopted a programme outlining the need for struggle to protect the interests of the workers and peasants and among other things to do away with the *zamindars'* estates. The Congress sent a message of greeting to the Comintern.

Both meetings reflected the growing influence of left, revolutionary forces in the country. Both these latter organisations voiced protest at the Delhi Pact and the agreement of the National Congress to participate in the second Round Table Conference.

However the left-sectarian position adopted by the Communists at this stage prevented them from carrying further the successes already achieved in the creation of mass organisations. This factor to a great degree accounts for the rapid decline in the work of the Workers' and Peasants' Party after 1931. However the further polarisation of the class forces in the country, and the development of the labour movement on an independent political footing made the leaders of the Communist Party decide that they must concentrate their efforts to consolidate their party's support among the masses.

### **The Third Non-Cooperation Movement. Struggle for Unity Within the Hindu Community**

In September 1931 Gandhi set off for London for the second Round Table Conference. The participants that year were the same as on the previous occasion.

At these negotiations the British employed the same tactics as before, going out of their way to fan religious hostility between the Hindu and Moslem communities. Gandhi, whose attitude to this problem was a progressive one, insisted that the vital condition for the regulation of relations between Hindus and Moslems was the granting of independence.

At the conference two quite different approaches to the question of communities started to emerge. The position that the National Congress adopted was that the resolution of controversial questions connected with relations between the two communities was an internal matter for the Indians themselves to settle and that settlement would be possible given self-government for India (what kind was not specified, whether Dominion status or complete independence). The British position, which the Muslim League was coming more and more to support, was the suggestion that insofar as the Indian representatives were unable to reach an agreement the government would be best advised to settle the problem by legislative means.

The British made sure that the negotiations ended in failure, attempting to make Gandhi and the National Congress appear responsible for it. However Gandhi's prestige did not appear to have suffered either within the National Congress or in the country as a whole, when he returned home after the work of the conference had been completed in December 1931. In India more of the necessary components of a revolutionary situation had since emerged: the peasants were still active in a number of provinces and uprisings had begun in Kashmir and Alwar. In violation of the Delhi Pact the British, in their turn, continued to take repressive steps to clamp down on the activities of the mass organisations affiliated to the Congress.

It was in this situation that Gandhi, after unsuccessful negotiations with the Viceroy in order to put a stop to the repression, announced a



new non-cooperation movement in January 1932, but this time in the form of *satyagraha* on an individual basis. Almost at once all the delegates to the Congress session being held in Delhi, including Gandhi, were arrested and this seriously undermined the effectiveness of the *satyagraha*.

During the new wave of repression the British were at the same time trying to accelerate the preliminary work on a new Government of India Act; they also encouraged the deepening of the gulf between the various trends within the national movement. Representatives of three sub-committees set up at the Round Table Conference, which had been concerned with the problems affecting the so-called religious and other minorities, arrived in India.

After consultations with the parties representing different communities the Communal Award providing representation for the communities within the Indian legislative bodies was announced in 1932.

Finding himself unable to achieve any agreement with the Muslim League, Gandhi now directed his efforts at undermining the British manoeuvre planned to set off the caste Hindus against the untouchables (who according to orthodox Hindu belief stood outside the caste structure). In the autumn of 1932 through the mediation of the Congress and Gandhi's own energetic efforts an agreement was reached between the leaders of the Federation of the Untouchables and the Hindu Maha Sabha to the effect that a definite number of places within the legislatures should be reserved for untouchables. This ruled out the possibility that elections might be organised on lines recommended by the British that involved a special electoral college for the untouchables.

In October negotiations began between the organisations representing the Hindu and Moslem communities which did not yield any results.

In order to consolidate the agreements already reached between the organisations representing the caste Hindus and the untouchables, in December 1932 and early 1933 Gandhi organised a nation-wide campaign to protest at the discrimination to which the untouchables were subjected. He started to refer to them as *Harijans* (People of God). The newspaper published by Gandhi under the same title soon won a wide readership.

In the autumn of 1932 a third Round Table Conference was held in London—once again the Congress did not take part as had happened at the first one—at which proposals for a new Indian constitution were drawn up in their final form.

At a time when the British authorities were going all out to suppress the mass movement, the uprisings in the princely states were being routed and the *satyagraha* campaign was gradually losing ground, Gandhi in May 1933 suspended the civil disobedience campaign.

Thus for a second time the Indian national revolution had to make a retreat.

## THE LEFT FORCES ASSUME A STRONGER POSITION IN THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT. STRUGGLE FOR LEADERSHIP INTENSIFIES

### The Economic Situation in India in the Mid-Thirties

After the economic crisis of 1929-1933 there ensued a long period of economic depression (the so-called Great Depression), that was followed in 1937 by a new world economic crisis. This sequence of events was interrupted by the outbreak of the Second World War.

The position of the toiling classes in town and country at this time was extremely hard. The mass impoverishment of the peasantry and the artisans during the crisis years gave rise to a substantial rise in the reserve labour force that was to be found in the main in disguised forms of rural overpopulation. The constant army of unemployed swelled to as many as several hundred thousand.

The growing overpopulation in agrarian areas led to increased rivalry among the landless peasants for every rented out plot of land; this situation in its turn provided ground for rack-renting by landlords, sub-tenure-holders and rich peasants.

During the years of economic crisis and the period after the crisis when the vast mass of the peasantry was reduced to a state of extreme poverty, stratification and class differentiations within the ranks of the peasantry took much firmer root than before. While on the one hand the number of poor peasants—small producers—who now found themselves with insufficient land or no land at all was rising steadily, on the other the rich peasants were asserting themselves both among the peasant landowners in the *rayatwari* regions and also among the privileged tenant farmers in the *zamindari* areas.

Expansion of commodity-money relations and the internal market accelerated the consolidation of new capitalist relations in the sphere of agricultural production. At the same time the continuing predominance of feudal practices in agriculture (large landed estates and the prevalence of trading and usury capital) supported by the colonialists brought agriculture to a state of stagnation and degradation, as is reflected, for example, in the deteriorating food balance in the country and the curtailment of India's exports. The consolidation of capitalist elements in Indian rural life served to exacerbate and complicate the contradictions inherent in the country's social development.

In the villages contradictions between the main classes and class strata were deepening and social tension was definitely on the increase.

The crisis which in the towns had led to the ruin of small-commodity producers, manufactories and small industrial plants, at the same time promoted the process of centralisation and the concentration of capital. In the thirties the first Indian monopolies



were being set up, particularly in the cement industry (in 1936 the Associated Syndicate was set up, in 1937 the powerful Dalmia-Jain group) and the sugar industry (in 1937 the cartel known as the Indian Sugar Syndicate consisting of 108 factories was set up).

Indian industry, mainly that involving large-scale factories and plants, was now gradually coming to play a large part in the internal market: it accounted for 41 per cent of textile production in 1927 and 62 per cent by 1937, and in metal production (the Tata company) the share provided by Indian-owned enterprises rose from 30 to 72 per cent between 1927 and 1934.

After Indian industrial and trading capital had started to expand, concentration and centralisation began to make themselves felt in the credit sphere as well. Between 1918 and 1937 the number of branches of the banks operating in India multiplied four times over, while the paid-up capital of the scheduled banks rose by a third between 1918 and 1940, and deposits over the same period by 60 per cent.

At the same time the transfer of capital from trading and money-lending to the spheres of banking and industry was gaining momentum.

The families of Indian millionaires such as Tata, Dalmia, Jain, Walchand, Birla, Singhanian, who had risen to prominence from the ranks of the powerful Indian bourgeoisie, assumed a dominant position among Indian entrepreneurs.

In a situation characterised by low levels of capitalist development in which pre-capitalist and early capitalist forms of property were predominant, the Indian monopolies constituted something of a superstructure above trading and usury capital. This was why income from trading and money-lending still constituted a considerable part of the incomes of the big bourgeoisie.

Despite certain links between the upper echelons of the Indian bourgeoisie not only with the feudal class, but also with the whole socio-economic and political edifice of the British colonial regime, the monopolistic trends discernible in Indian large-scale entrepreneurship reflected beyond any doubt the development of national capitalism and the intensification of anti-imperialist tendencies.

British imperialism attempted to establish its control over the activities of the Indian bourgeoisie. With this aim in mind the Reserve Bank of India was set up in 1935: it took on the function of a central government bank, and enjoyed the right of emission. The Bank controlled state finances but at the same time Indian banking capital and large money-lending enterprises as well. In 1936 a Managing Agencies Act was passed facilitating the establishment of the British monopolies' control over the Indian economy. These measures served to exacerbate still further the contradictions between the Indian and the British bourgeoisie.

The economic and social development of India during the 1930s led to a deepening of national and class contradictions (although on

varying bases and to varying degrees according to the specific class of Indian society concerned).

However the course of political events in India in the pre-war period that led up to a new upsurge of the national liberation movement in 1936-1939 cannot be accounted for by economic factors alone.

During the years of increased revolutionary activity (1929-1933) major changes took place in the political life of the country, among which two were of decisive importance. Firstly, the working class emerged as an independent political force thanks to the efforts of the CPI, the workers' and peasants' parties and the Red Trade Union Centre. Secondly, preconditions now existed for the formation of peasants' class organisations and for the peasantry to assume a role as an independent factor in Indian political life.

### **The Workers' Struggle in 1934-1939. Restored Unity of the Trade Union Movement**

The development of the economic and political struggle of the working class in the years 1934-1939 was characterised by an increase in the influence of the Communists within the organised labour movement, who initiated efforts to restore the unity of the trade union movement.

This process consisted of two stages. In the first place there was a move to restore unity (1934-1935) from below in the course of various strikes and efforts were made to overcome resistance on the part of national-reformist and right-reformist sectarians.

An important landmark in the labour movement was the three-month strike of textile workers in 1934, when for the first time a strike involved a whole branch of industry. During that strike united action on the part of the various unions from three different trade union centres was achieved.

The decisive role played by the Communists in this strike and their union organisation alarmed the reactionary forces so much that the colonial authorities banned the Communist Party and a number of unions that came under its influence in 1934. This move complicated very seriously the work undertaken by the vanguard of the left forces.

In 1935 large-scale strikes of dockers and railway workers were organised by various union bodies in co-operation.

In response to a proposal made by the leaders of the Red Trade Union Centre this organisation rejoined the All-India Trade Union Centre in April 1935 in accordance with the following fundamental principles: the recognition of the principle of class struggle, the formation of a single trade union in each industry, a refusal to become affiliated to international federations, the right to engage in propaganda provided no attacks on each other were made, the compulsory



subordination of the minority to the majority (this last principle was a major concession on the part of the Communists, since prior to the merger the Red Trade Union Centre had numbered ten thousand members and the All-India Trade Union Congress eighty thousand).

Despite sabotage engaged in by certain of the right trade union leaders, work to bring together the various unions within the framework of a structure run according to crafts and professions was crowned with success in 1936. The first result stemming from this new unity was a growth in the number of strikes achieving complete or partial success (47 per cent of all strikes organised in 1936). The strikes now organised lasted longer and were more determined.

During the second stage of the struggle to unite the trade union movement (1936-1939) the working class gradually abandoned its defensive stance of the early thirties and began to demand higher wages and recognition of the unions on the part of the entrepreneurs and the authorities. The number of strikes continued to grow, and also the number of those taking part in them, as illustrated in the following table showing annual averages:

Years	Numbers of strikes	Numbers of strikers in thousands
1934-1935	150	200
1936-1939	400	500

The unification of these two trade union organisations and the acceptance by the leadership of the united All-India Trade Union Congress of certain fundamental principles proposed by the Communists served to add weight to the political activities of the working class, as was reflected, for example, during the May Day celebrations in 1935 and 1936. A special Workers' Week was organised in 1936 during which anti-imperialist slogans were used. During that same year the 15th session of the All-India Trade Union Congress discussed the possibility of the broad involvement of the working class in the anti-imperialist movement and the methods used in the liberation struggle, and it also declared political strikes to be a vital component of that struggle.

The fact that these two trade union organisations had reunited had an important effect on the growth of the organised working class: in 1936-1939 the total number of trade unions doubled. The influence of the All-India Trade Union Congress on the masses of the working people grew considerably, a development which served to undermine the position of the right-reformist leaders of the Indian Trade Union Federation.

The general strikes of 1937 played a decisive role in the development of the economic struggle waged by the working class: these included strikes by the textile workers of Cawnpore, by the

railway workers employed on the Bengal-Nagpur railway and by the workers from the Bengal jute factories, all of which stirred the less active strata of the proletariat into action.

In order to retain their influence within the ranks of the working class, the leaders of the Indian Trade Union Federation agreed to amalgamate with the All-India Trade Union Congress, which they finally did in April 1938 at a joint session in Nagpur. This unification of the two organisations involved considerable ideological concessions made to the Federation, which came out in favour of class collaboration between workers and entrepreneurs. In the newly united AITUC leading positions were occupied by Congress members. Despite a certain decline in the political activity of the AITUC in 1938-1939 the reunification of the Indian trade union organisations had a positive effect on the economic struggle waged by the working class: in those years the strike movement spread even to the most backward parts of India, including the princely states.

In 1939 the unification of the unions for the main labour groups—the railway workers, the sailors, dockers and textile workers—had also been completed in the main. Some of the newly amalgamated unions (those of the railway-workers and textile workers for instance) held joint conferences in 1938-1939 involving all workers from a specific branch of industry, which had a positive effect upon the trade unions at local level in the individual enterprises.

The working class which had set up its own party and its own class-based trade unions in the midst of relentless battles against the imperialists and the bourgeoisie, now embarked on a struggle against the national bourgeoisie for the leadership of the national movement. This factor determined to a large extent the course which events within the anti-imperialist camp now took in the second half of the thirties.

The struggle was centred in two main spheres: the fight for leadership of the peasant movement, and the struggle to set up a united anti-imperialist front.

### **The Peasants' Movement. The Formation of the All-India Peasant Organisation**

The *Kisan Sabha* organisations set up in the years 1934-1935 continued their struggle to achieve the fulfilment of the peasantry's main demands—lower land rent, lower taxes, etc. The main activities engaged in by the members of this movement were rallies, marches and conferences at village, tahsil and district level. The *Kisan Sabha* was particularly active in the provinces of Bihar, the Punjab and the northern part of the Madras Presidency (the Andhra region), where peasant organisations were active not only at district, but also provincial level.



Most of the local *Kisan Sabhas* were influenced by the Communists and the peasant democrats. Attempts by the National Congress to gain control over the organised peasant movement were unsuccessful. It was in this situation that N. G. Ranga, V. V. Giri and a group of other national-reformists began to make preparations in order to found an all-India peasant organisation under the aegis of the National Congress. At the preparatory conference held in 1935 the Ranga group enjoyed the most political support. However the leadership of the provincial *Kisan Sabhas* which had consented to unification represented the left forces; that was made apparent at the very first session of the new organisation.

At the constituent assembly of the All-India Kisan Sabha held at Lucknow in April 1936 at the same time as the regular session of the National Congress (a move planned to symbolise the proximity of aims shared by the two organisations), the national-reformists could not secure a majority in the leading body of the AIKS, namely the Central Kisan Council.

At the Council meeting in August of that year a Charter of Peasants' Rights was adopted that became a basic document of the AIKS. It provided for the liquidation of *zamindari* estates, reform of the land-revenue system in the *rayatwari* areas, lower rent, etc. This meant that the Charter concentrated the efforts of the Indian peasants on the struggle against the imperialists and the feudal lords in as wide a front of national forces as possible, which would include the rural bourgeoisie and even groups of the landlord classes in the *rayatwari* areas.

The significance of the Charter lay in the fact that it brought together the peasants' struggle against the feudal lords and the national liberation movement. Propagation of the principles incorporated in the Charter by the local *Kisan Sabha* organisations helped the peasants to attain an awareness of their class interests, and become increasingly conscious of national and democratic issues.

The position of the left forces within the All-India Kisan Sabha was reinforced at the next session held in December 1936, which like the first session took place at the same time and in the same place as the session of the National Congress (this time in the small town of Faizpur in Maharashtra). The meeting approved the Charter of Peasants' Rights and after a fierce struggle with the Ranga group it adopted as its emblem not the Congress flag but the flag of the Communist Party—a red flag bearing a hammer and sickle. One of the leaders of the *Kisan Sabha* from Bihar, the revolutionary democrat S. S. Saraswati, was elected General Secretary.

The creation of the All-India Kisan Sabha was an important landmark in the history of the Indian peasants' movement. The largest class within Indian society was beginning to play an independent role in the national liberation movement.

The struggle to secure the leadership of the workers' and peasants' mass organisations assumed various forms, which depended to a large

extent on changes in the internal political situation and also on the internal evolution of the National Congress itself.

#### PROGRESS TOWARDS A UNITED NATIONAL FRONT. THE INTENSIFICATION OF THE STRUGGLE WITHIN THE CONGRESS

##### The Founding of the Congress-Socialist Party

In 1934 shortly before elections to the Central Legislative Assembly, the right wing of the National Congress revived the Swaraj party as a Congress body to take part in the elections. However at this stage the conservative forces within the Congress party had already lost much of their influence. The recent consolidation of left forces throughout the country, the firm position that had been won by the Communists and revolutionary democrats in the leading bodies of the working people's mass organisations compelled the Congress leadership to introduce various structural changes that would facilitate the broadening of the party's mass base.

The Congress remained the most influential of the nation-wide organisations and, in the years that had followed its major reorganisation in 1918-1920, it had gradually turned from a bourgeois-landlord party into a bloc embracing various trends and groupings of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalists representing a fairly broad class spectrum, although the national bourgeoisie still played a leading role in the party. The broad range of opinion represented within it led eventually to the emergence of two main trends within the Congress: the right-reformist wing supporting Gandhi which predominated, and the left wing. The latter wing was represented not only by the young members that supported Subhas Chandra Bose and Jawaharlal Nehru, but also by the groups which declared themselves to be in support of the building of a socialist society in India. Among these latter groups support for scientific socialism and co-operation with the Communists was growing.

This trend was countered by a group of socialists headed by Jaiprakash Narayan, Acharya Narendra Dev and Ashoka Mehta who set up the Congress-Socialist Party in 1934, which worked within the Congress framework. In October of that year the party's inaugural conference was held in Bombay; in its ideology and politics this party had much in common with the European Social-Democrats.

The Congress-Socialists like other left groups within the Congress considered that their most vital task was the organisation of mass struggle by the working people and the creation of a firm social foundation for the Congress among the workers and the peasants.

Among the left groups two main approaches to methods of work among the masses soon crystallised. The reformist section held that it



was sufficient to promote economic struggle while the Congress retained its monopoly over the organisation of political campaigning. The revolutionary section on the other hand was in favour of combining mass-scale economic and political struggles. However both sections in the left wing of the Congress believed that the Congress leadership of the mass movement should be undivided. It is revealing to note in this context that according to the Constitution of the Congress-Socialist Party only Congress members could join it.

The rapidly growing influence of left forces within the Congress obliged Gandhi to prepare the ground for certain changes in the structure of the various leading bodies of the Congress in order to ensure that he and his supporters should be in control of the organisation. At the Bombay session of the National Congress held in October 1934 an amendment was introduced to the statutes: the Working Committee of the Congress (its political bureau) was no longer to be elected by the All-India Congress Committee (its supreme body between sessions) but to be nominated by the president of the Congress elected each year. The Bombay session ratified Gandhi's decision to call a halt to the non-cooperation movement and adopted a resolution to the effect that the Congress should take part in the elections to the Central Legislature.

At this stage Gandhi formally left the Congress. This helped him to retain his popularity among the masses and his prestige as a national leader above party politics, insofar as he was now no longer responsible for the manoeuvrings going on inside the Congress and for the partial conciliation with the colonialists in the period of tactical retreat. At this period he threw himself once more into intensive propaganda for his constructive programme (Hindu-Moslem unity, the struggle against the concept of "untouchability", encouragement of hand-loom weaving and spinning, and promotion of small-scale industry). This new emphasis served to consolidate his influence among urban and rural craftsmen, artisans, small-scale producers and traders and the urban poor, i.e. those who made up the main driving force in the mass non-cooperation movement.

#### **The "Constitution of 1935" and New Elections to the Legislatures**

The Congress retained its dominating influence among the propertied classes of India and this explains why in the elections in November 1934, in which 650 thousand people participated, it gained more than half the votes and seats in the Central Legislative Assembly.

In the new Central Legislature not a single party supported the new Government of India Bill, that had been elaborated on the basis of the recommendations put forward by the Simon Commission and the Round Table Conference. However the new "Constitution" was

ratified by the British Parliament in August 1935.

The new law incorporated concessions to the Indian capitalists and landlords. The electorate had been enlarged so as to include 12 per cent of the adult population, which reflected a reduction in property and other qualifications and meant the vote had now been granted to the lower echelons of the propertied classes and certain groups of working people (the more prosperous peasants and certain categories of workers, who voted for the representatives of the workers' electoral college). The prerogatives of the legislative assemblies had also been widened to some extent: the provincial governments (reorganised executive councils working under the governors) were now responsible to them. Meanwhile the Act perpetuated the principle of diarchy and virtually kept total power in the hands of the British colonial administration.

It also became possible for wide use to be made of the electoral-college system at the elections, thus introducing a split in the national movement and consolidating the position of the conservative forces. In order to complicate Hindu-Moslem relations still further and in order to obstruct any agreement between the National Congress and the Muslim League, the Moslems and other "minorities" were granted certain privileges. Hindus, including the untouchables, had 70 per cent of the votes, but only 55 per cent of the seats. The influence of the princes was also on the increase at this time and their representatives constituted a third of the members of the Central Legislative Assembly and two-fifths of those in the Council of State.

Nothing was said in the Act with regard to the status of the country, although provision was made for its possible dismemberment in the future. This was taken care of in the so-called "federal scheme", according to which the princes were allowed to choose, whether they would seek to be included in the British Empire or to establish independent links with it. The "federal scheme" provoked frenzied indignation and was never implemented.

The publication of this new constitution for India led to widespread protests throughout the country. It came to be known as the "slave constitution".

The new elections to the Central and Provincial legislatures were planned to take place in 1937. Preparations for the elections were now made on a wide scale at a time when there was a mounting tide of criticism against British colonial policy.

In the course of these preparations the Communists and revolutionary democrats, at that time still aligned to the former, launched a struggle to fight for a united anti-imperialist front. The decisions adopted at the Seventh Comintern Congress exerted a decisive influence on the policy of the Indian Communists. Concrete suggestions were made to the Indian Communists by Palme Dutt and Ben Bradley (leaders of the British Communist Party) in an open letter.



The Communist Party of India adopted a resolution approving the entry of Communists into the Congress. In May 1936 the All-India Trade Union Congress adopted a resolution to enter the Congress as a group and a similar resolution was adopted by the All-India Kisan Sabha. As the Congress leadership took a negative view of this move, fearful lest a wing under Communist leadership be set up within the organisation, a large number of Communists and revolutionary democrats joined the Congress on an individual basis, in order to ensure that it was nevertheless turned into the spearhead of a united anti-imperialist front.

The result of these actions was the emergence of a stronger left wing in the Congress, as was demonstrated at the Lucknow session (May 1936) at which Jawaharlal Nehru was elected President. He appointed a Working Committee in which a third of the members were representatives of the left.

The political stand adopted by Jawaharlal Nehru in the thirties was to a certain degree contradictory and inconsistent. By this stage his socio-political and philosophical views had taken more or less definitive shape and were to a certain extent moulded by scientific socialism. Yet Nehru's socialist ideals were eclectically combined with certain philosophical principles, particularly in the sphere of the practical implementation of political decisions, that he shared with Gandhi.

Nehru like many other leaders of the left wing in the Congress, including Subhas Chandra Bose, had been deeply impressed by the successes in socialist construction that had been achieved in the Soviet Union. They publicly voiced their sympathies for the Soviet Union and came out in support of the heroic Spanish people and the Chinese and Abyssinian freedom fighters.

Differences that had existed between the two most prominent leaders of the Congress left wing since the end of the twenties and early thirties were still conspicuous. Bose devoted considerable attention to bolstering his personal support within the Congress with the Bengal provincial organisation as its core, so as eventually to be able to change the composition of the leadership and the party policy. Nehru in the main followed the party policy evolved by Gandhi. This course of action assured him firm support from the leader of the Congress. An important aspect of Nehru's work in the middle and late thirties was his extension of the international ties between the Congress and various progressive movements and organisations, particularly in the course of his visits abroad. Nehru regarded the broadening of the Indian nationalists' foreign ties as an important factor in the advance of the liberation struggle.

The Lucknow session adopted a resolution to the effect that the Congress should participate in the elections using the campaign as an opportunity to protest against the "slave constitution".

At the Faizpur session of the Congress in December of that year preliminary demands relating to the agrarian question were put

forward as an alternative to the Charter of Peasants' Rights. The resolutions envisaged an extension of the peasants' movement under the aegis of the Congress in its campaigning for lowering land rents, interest on loans from money-lenders and land taxes. The ratification of this document bore witness to the determination within the Congress to compete with the Communists to assume leadership of the Kisan Sabha.

Meanwhile the general-democratic movement was coming to embrace more and more social strata and groups. In 1936 the All-India Students' Federation, and the All-India States Peoples Conference and the All-India Progressive Writers' Association were set up. In all those organisations not only Congress members played an active part but also Communists and revolutionary democrats. This helped to pave the way towards the creation of a national anti-imperialist front. The Communists supported the Congress at the elections, only putting up their own nominees within the workers' electoral college that was allocated only three per cent of the seats.

The party-political structure in India by the middle of the thirties presented a far more complex picture than had been the case five years earlier. Apart from the Congress and the League and the organisation representing the Hindu community, Hindu Maha Sabha, in certain provinces local bourgeois and petty-bourgeois parties were operating and opposing the Congress: the Union Party in the Punjab, the Praja Krishak Samiti (People's Peasant Party) in Bengal, the National Peasant Party in the United Provinces, the Independent Labour Party in Bombay and the Central Provinces, the Justice Party in Madras and the Advance Party in Orissa.

These parties represented not only petty-bourgeois groups but also extreme reactionary strata of the nobility and landowners. The activity of some of them was very communal (e.g., the Unionists or Praja Krishak Samiti) or caste-based (e.g., the Independent Labour Party led by Ambedkar and the Justice Party). However their influence was limited and the main opponents of the Congress were the Hindu Maha Sabha and the Muslim League.

Within the latter a more progressive wing had taken shape by this time led by M. A. Jinnah. The League which had previously not encouraged any mass-scale anti-imperialist struggle, declared at its session in Lucknow in 1937 that its main aim was to fight for India's complete independence. However the League advocated the transformation of the country into a federation of free democratic states, once that independence had been achieved. The new programme elaborated by the Muslim League made it possible for it to win over some of the Moslems who had formerly been supporters of the Congress. The advocacy of a federal structure for independent India was in accordance with the religious, communal activity of the League, which claimed to be the sole champion of the interests of the Indian Moslems, and which represented, in as yet embryonic form, the future demand for the formation of an independent state of Pakistan.



**The Congress and the League  
in the Provincial Governments.  
The Political Struggle Reaches New Heights**

In the ensuing elections the Indian National Congress emerged victorious in eight provinces out of the eleven, where it then set up provincial governments. In 1938 the Congress and the Muslim League set up coalition governments in Assam and Sind.

The Congress governments began to elaborate new agrarian laws in order to extend the group of the privileged tenant farmers, impose limits on rent rates and lay down a moratorium on debts to money-lenders, etc.—measures which were in accordance not only with the interests of the toiling peasantry, but also with those of the bourgeois elements in the rural areas.

At that time the Congress governments had prepared labour laws that impinged upon the rights of the revolutionary trade unions such as the Bombay Industrial Disputes Act. The working class responded to this anti-worker policy of the Congress with strikes and protest rallies.

Actions organised by the working class now assumed an increasingly political character. In March 1938 on the anniversary of the Meerut Conspiracy Case, a CPI Day was organised with great success calling for the legalisation of the party; in May this was followed by a Day in Support of the Sholapur Prisoners (who had been sentenced to imprisonment after leading the Sholapur uprising of 1930). An important indication of the growing political consciousness of the working class was provided by the organisation of proletarian revolutionary celebrations. In 1939 May Day was celebrated with anti-imperialist rallies, and appeals were made for the creation of a united and nation-wide front. May Day meetings and demonstrations at this period reflected the growth of class solidarity among the Indian workers. These were held in industrial centres all over British India and also in certain towns in the princely states.

Changes in the internal political situation after the 1937 elections also made themselves felt in the forms assumed by the peasant movement's activities at that time. The main form of peasant action organised by the *Kisan Sabha* was the mass propaganda campaign in the course of which its activists expounded the policy of the Sabha, sought to broaden its base and collected signatures to the petitions calling for agrarian reforms (changes in the tenancy laws) which were then submitted to the Congress ministers of the provincial governments. Marches and mass peasant rallies on a grand scale were organised in 1937-1938 in the United Provinces, Bihar, Andhra and certain other parts of the country, in fact in all districts where the local branches of the All-India Peasants' Union were active.

The influence of the *Kisan Sabha* was growing rapidly: in 1938 six hundred thousand members were registered and in 1939 eight hundred thousand. The above-mentioned agrarian laws were introduced as a result of the pressure brought to bear on the Congress ministers and legislators by the organised peasant movement.

The successful development of workers' and peasants' organisations provided fertile soil for the consolidation of workers' and peasants' unity. In 1937 and 1938 peasants organisations in Bengal and Madras held rallies and demonstrations in support of the striking workers. For their part the trade unions supported the peasant delegations that made their way to the provincial centres.

The co-ordination of activities of the workers' and peasants' organisations began to take root on a nation-wide scale. At the meeting of the All-India Trade Union Congress held in January 1938 in Delhi, points relating to the agrarian question were included in the Charter of workers' demands. At the end of 1938 and in early 1939 one of the All-India Trade Union Congress leaders, the Communist S. S. Mirajkar together with S. S. Saraswati, leader of the *Kisan Sabha*, made a joint trip through Maharashtra addressing meetings of workers and peasants. Finally in July 1939 a co-ordination committee consisting of representatives from the All-India Trade Union Congress and the All-India Peasants' Union was set up. The alliance between the working class and the peasantry in India had become a political reality.

In those prewar years the position of the Communist Party of India had grown much stronger and it was now waging a difficult struggle underground in face of cruel repressive measures. The Communist press was playing an important part in popularising ideas of scientific socialism as well as the Party's policy. Communist brochures and leaflets were published illegally and the Communists also put out legal publications, of which particular importance was attached to the weekly *National Front* published in 1938-1939. The Communist Party was steadily gaining more ground among the trade unions and the peasant organisations, in which it was collaborating successfully with the revolutionary democrats. An example of such collaboration is provided by the work of Indulal Yajnik and S. S. Saraswati. It was at that time that the nucleus of the Communist leadership was crystallising, it included such men as Adhikari, Ghate, Mirajkar, Dange and Muzaffar Ahmad. The Communist movement in India grew stronger in the ideological struggle against Gandhism, the struggle against the right-socialist theories of the Congress-Socialists and the petty-bourgeois sectarian views of M. N. Roy.

This course of events seriously alarmed the leaders of the National Congress. In some places (such as Bihar for instance) the Congress politicians attempted to split the peasant organisations, while in others (such as the United Provinces) they sought to set up alternative *Kisan Sabhas*. In January 1938 the Congress Working



Committee approved a proposal put forward by the Bihar party organisation to ban Congress members from working in the *Kisan Sabha*; however under pressure from public opinion the February session of the Congress revoked that decision.

All attempts by Communists and revolutionary democrats to turn the Congress into a united front met with firm resistance from its leadership anxious to monopolise the freedom movement.\*

The growing strength of the left forces outside the Congress, the more effective action of the organised labour movement and the peasant movement on the one hand, and the participation of Congress members—through the provincial governments and legislatures—in the work of the colonial administration on the other, helped to accelerate the political divisions within the Congress.

### Growing Differences within the National Congress

As the work of the liberation front began to proceed on a wider front and it began to acquire deeper roots, the Congress came to represent not only socio-political forces that varied in their social and class content, but also a bloc of organisations upholding various local interests. Local and regional trends in the internal party politics of the Congress became more prominent at the end of the thirties, as the national movements gained strength, a development which in itself reflected the emergence of national communities in India. It was in the Congress provinces of Andhra and the Carnatic\*\* that these movements achieved their highest level, provinces in which the bourgeois-national organisations the Andhra Maha Sabha and the United Carnatic League operated. The struggle to achieve national self-determination started to develop in some states of Orissa and in the state of Kashmir.

At the end of the thirties almost all of the six hundred princely states had been drawn into the general democratic movement under the leadership of the National Congress. At the beginning of 1938 political organisations had been set up in sixty of these states; they were known as Praja mandal, Praja parishad (popular alliances).

In 1937-1938 local bourgeois-national organisations in some of the provinces, for example Mysore, Travancore, Rajkot (Gujarat) and several others organised *hartals* aimed at holding in check the autocratic power of the princes. In most of the princely states a struggle was waged under the leadership of the bourgeois and landlord

\* Nehru supported the idea of a united leadership in principle but on the condition of a complete ideological surrender by the Communist Party to the Congress.

\*\* The Carnatic was divided for administrative purposes between the Bombay province and the states of Hyderabad and Mysore.

elements anxious to participate in the administration of the affairs of the states. However in Kashmir and Travancore the movements assumed an anti-feudal character, while in the small states of Gangpur (Orissa) and Ramdurg (Bombay province) peasant action soon developed into uprisings.

The involvement of the princely states in the national movement embracing the whole country undoubtedly served to strengthen not only the movement itself but also the National Congress. At the same time the entry of this new element into the arena could not help but complicate the situation within the Congress.

Open clashes between the left and the right in the Congress took place at the Haripura (Bengal) session, where in defiance of Gandhi's views the supporters of S.C. Bose, recently elected President, drew up a plan for militant action in support of the *purna swaraj*.

Bose's position was strengthened by the fact that within the All-India Congress Committee a left wing had also taken shape, and that at least forty per cent of the delegates elected by the provincial organisations to attend the next session were from the left.

It was in this situation that the right wing of the Congress, led by Pattabhi Sitaramayya and actively supported by Gandhi, launched an open attack against the Congress President. Under pressure from Gandhi the Working Committee, which opposed Bose, resigned. However Bose was nevertheless reelected to the post of President at the January session of the All-India Congress Committee.

In March 1939 a Congress session was held in the town of Tripura the capital of a state by the same name in North-Eastern India, in an exceedingly tense atmosphere. After a bitter struggle within the party G.B. Pant, representing the right-centrist majority and supporting Gandhi's line, succeeded in pushing through a resolution empowering Gandhi to appoint the new Working Committee on his own.

In April 1939 Bose resigned from the post of President and Rajendra Prasad, leader of the Bihar Congress organisation and one of Gandhi's oldest comrades-in-arms, was elected in his place. Soon afterwards Bose left the Congress with a large group of his supporters to set up a party known as the Forward Bloc that was to become influential mainly in Bengal.

This split in the Congress accelerated the hardening of the differences within its left wing. While Nehru was supporting Gandhi's line and that of his group within the Congress leadership, the left groupings of Congress-Socialists (particularly in Kerala, Andhra and the United Provinces) left the Congress in 1939-1940 and set up the nuclei of the local Communist Party organisations.

However the new wave of revolutionary activity that was beginning at this stage and the regrouping of political forces within the country, to which that would eventually lead, were now interrupted by the outbreak of World War II.



## INDIA IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR

### THE POSITION OF THE POLITICAL PARTIES AND THE ANTI-IMPERIALIST MOVEMENT DURING THE EARLY WAR YEARS (1939-1941)

#### India Declared a Belligerent. The Position of the Political Parties

After Britain had entered the war in Europe, Lord Linlithgow, the Viceroy of India, declared India a belligerent. This act of the colonial authorities undertaken without any preliminary consultation with representatives of the Indian political parties aroused widespread public protest. During the autumn of 1939 a wave of demonstrations and protest rallies swept across the country. India was the only country (of those which had declared war on Nazi Germany) in which a mass-scale anti-war movement gained a wide following.

In protest at the Viceroy's action the Congress faction of the Central Legislature boycotted sessions. However, the Viceroy, making use of his prerogatives, passed the Government of India Amendment Act and the Defence of India Act, which gave the colonial administration full powers for the continued and indeed complete suppression of democratic freedoms (of assembly, the press, etc.) and introduced preventive detention and also provided for the dissolution of provincial governments (responsible to the legislatures) by British governors.

On September 14, 1939, the All-India Congress Committee passed a special declaration outlining its stand on the war. It made clear that the Congress supported Britain's war effort under the following conditions: official acknowledgement by the British Government of India's right to self-determination; convocation of a constituent assembly; recognition of the Indian political parties' right to assume control of India's political affairs at a future date; immediate establishment of a government under the Viceroy responsible to the Central Legislature.

The Muslim League also declared its support for Britain's war effort, on condition that the Muslims be accorded increased representation in the legislative organs.

Only the reactionary camp—the princes, feudal lords and the comprador bourgeoisie—assured the British colonial administration of its unconditional support.

The various stands adopted by the Indian political parties reflected the ambivalent attitude of the Indian national bourgeoisie to India's involvement in the war. On the one hand, the prospect of

various military orders held out the promise of increased production and a considerable rise in profits, while on the other hand, the difficult military and political position, in which Britain now found itself, opened up new possibilities for the attainment of certain political concessions.

While the Indian capitalists were playing an active part in the work of the bodies set up by the colonial administration to organise the allocation of military orders—an economic resources council, the Supplies Department, etc.—political representatives of the Indian bourgeoisie continued their complex bargaining with the British Government, and with the Viceroy, its representative in India.

The British Government, in answer as it were to the question voiced by the Indian bourgeois nationalists in resolutions drawn up by the National Congress and Muslim League concerning their attitude to the war, published a White Paper on October 17, 1939, in which it outlined the aims of the war. Avoiding a direct answer to the demands laid out in the above-mentioned declaration, drawn up by the All-India Congress Committee, the British Government proclaimed its intention to elaborate a new Constitution for India after the war, after consulting with representatives of the Indian political parties. It promised that more Indian members would be admitted to the Executive Council working under the Viceroy and suggested that an advisory committee affiliated to this Council be set up consisting of representatives from the political parties and the princes.

The White Paper contained for all intents and purposes a negative reply to the opposition's proposals. As a sign of protest at the line taken by the British administration the Congress ministers in eight provinces resigned office. At this juncture the Governors, in accordance with the proposed amendment to the Constitution already published, proceeded to appoint new executive bodies.

On October 23 the leaders of the National Congress published their official answer to the British proposals, contained in the White Paper, which can be summarised as follows: 1) a responsible government should be set up in India without delay; 2) a new Constitution should be drawn up by the constituent assembly; 3) refusal to comply with the demands of the National Congress would in the long run leave it with no alternative but to launch another civil disobedience campaign.

In this new situation the leadership of the Muslim League attempted to consolidate its position at the expense of its main political rival—the National Congress. On December 12, 1939 the League celebrated a "Day of Deliverance", a campaign for "liberation from the Congress yoke" (that was after the resignation of the provincial Congress governments), however, this movement did not take root on a mass scale. The provincial governments in Assam, Sind and the North-West Frontier Province led by members of the



League continued to collaborate with the colonial administration.

The separatist and essentially sectarian stand of the Muslim League leaders shaped in large measure the subsequent development of the political struggle in the country. There is no denying that the policy of the Muslim League played into the hands of the British, who for a long time had been pinning their hopes on fanning conflict between Hindus and Moslems. However, the colonial administration could also not fail to appreciate that the political influence of the Muslim League was much weaker than that of the National Congress, which at the period in question had some influence even over certain sections of the Moslem community in India. Insofar as the resolute stand of the Congress leadership was given new impetus by the mass anti-imperialist movement then coming into being, the British Government saw itself obliged to approach the leaders of the national movement with new proposals. On January 10, 1940 the Viceroy made a speech at a club in Bombay declaring that after the war India would be granted dominion status to be elaborated with reference, among other things, to the interests of the princes, and also those of the minorities, while Britain would remain responsible for defence over another thirty years after that.

However, these new British proposals once more proved unacceptable for the National Congress, since they gave no positive reply to the nationalists' main demand, namely the immediate establishment of a responsible government under the Viceroy.

### **The Mass Movement in 1939 and 1940.**

#### **Growing Contradictions Within the National Movement**

Anti-war demonstrations in India organised by Communists and Congress Socialists had started as early as September 1939. The largest of these was organised in Madras. In October and November of that year anti-war strikes took place in Cawnpore, Patna, Jharia and a number of other industrial centres. In late 1939 a total of 110 strikes was organised, in which 170 thousand people took part. Also at the end of that year a broad movement of the workers and other strata of the working people started up that was directed against the first economic consequences of the war, namely the high prices and speculation affecting essential commodities.

Important for the co-ordination of activities by the Left forces in the national movement was the All-India anti-imperialist conference of workers', peasant and student organisations held in October 1939 at Nagpur. The Communist Party of India, the Congress Socialists and the Forward Block took part in it. Resolutions adopted by the conference incorporated the uncompromising stand by the Left

wing of the national liberation movement with regard to British imperialism. The Indian Communists, as indeed the Left nationalists, regarded the war as an imperialist one and opposed any Indian involvement in it.

In response to a call from Left organisations, participants of that conference, anti-war demonstrations and rallies were organised in the Punjab, the United Provinces, Andhra and Malabar. Once again conditions in India were ripe for the establishment of a united front of all anti-imperialist forces. However, these efforts were impeded by the stand adopted by the leadership of the two main political parties in the country—the National Congress and the Muslim League.

The Congress leadership took a negative view of the mass action organised by Left forces and did not support either the strike movement of the working class or the peasant movement. Even when conducting mass anti-British campaigns it sought above all to consolidate its leadership of the national movement. Typically enough, the Congress session of 1940 adopted a resolution calling for the organisation of a new mass-scale civil disobedience campaign; however, it was specified that once again Gandhi was to lay down when it should begin and what forms it should take; once again he had been appointed dictator of the *satyagraha*.

The struggle against the Left wing in the National Congress, developing with the approval of the party leadership since the session in Tripura (1939), undermined the organisation's unity. The next session of the National Congress held in Ramgarh (Bihar) in March 1940 was not attended by a delegation of one of the largest of the Congress provincial organisations—that of Bengal. The supporters of Subhash Chandra Bose, who constituted a majority within it, boycotted the session as a sign of protest against the disciplinary measures taken by the Congress leaders against Subhash Chandra Bose (after the Tripura session he had been stripped of the right to hold leading office in the party since he had delivered speeches at a rally without the previous permission of the Congress Working Committee).

Bose's supporters conducted their own "anti-compromise conference" at which the leaders of the National Congress and Gandhi were subjected to harsh criticism. The Communist Party of India, which was aspiring to co-operation with the Left forces within the Congress, nevertheless, did not take part in this particular conference since it held that the conference was dealing a serious blow to the unity of the anti-imperialist movement.

At the same time as these sessions of the Congress and of Bose's supporters were in progress, a meeting of the Muslim League was held at Lahore in March 1940. It passed a resolution which was to play a fateful part in the subsequent history of the Indian national movement: the ultimate aim of the struggle being waged by the Muslim League was declared to be the creation of Pakistan



(literally the "state of the pure", i.e., the adherents of Islam)—a state of Indian Moslems.

Gandhi and the leaders of the National Congress criticised this resolution of the Muslim League. An indication of the efforts to promote Hindu-Moslem unity at this time was the election at Ramgarh of one of the leading Moslem national leaders—Maulana Abul Kalam Azad—as President of the Congress.

The growing differences between the various political trends within the Indian national movement made political manoeuvring still easier for the British imperialists and obstructed the creation of a united liberation front; nevertheless, they were not sufficient to hold back the advance of class struggle in the country.

Traditional celebration of Independence Day on January 26, 1940 developed into mass-scale anti-British demonstrations and strikes. In March-April 1940 a general strike of Bombay textile workers took place, organised by the revolutionary trade union Girni Kamgar. One-day strikes to manifest solidarity with the Bombay textile workers were held in other industrial centres of the Bombay province.

In 1939-1940 there was an increase both in the number of workers participating in strikes (from 409,000 to 450,000) and also in the overall total of lost man-days (from 5,000,000 to 7,500,000 million).

Despite the fact that the overall total of strikes in 1940 declined somewhat (from 406 to 322), the increases in the number of those involved and the total number of lost working days show that the strikes were more organised by this time, and the economic struggle of the working class more determined.

The colonial administration, as always, responded to the mass struggle with repressive measures. A ban was placed on what formally had been legal publications of the Communists, and also periodicals issued by the trade-union and peasant organisations; arrests of workers' and peasant leaders also began. All these measures, however, were insufficient to stem the further development of the organised workers' movement.

In September 1940 the next session of the All-India Trade Union Congress took place, at which official support was voiced for co-operation between the trade-union centres in various parts of the country. The Congress embraced 195 trade unions with a total of 374,000 members—blue- and white-collar workers. Although the majority of the wage workers remained outside the organised trade-union movement, the elimination of the split within it which had existed previously was an important landmark in the history of the Indian labour movement.

Not only did the labour movement make advances during this period but the general democratic movement also intensified its efforts to restructure the territorial division of India on a language basis—by means of setting up so-called linguistic provinces:

Maharashtra, Karnatak, Andhra and Kerala (i.e., by linking together territories incorporated into various provinces and principalities and inhabited by the corresponding peoples: the Marathas, the Kannaras, the Andhras and the Malayalis). In Bengal a campaign got underway designed to bring together with the existing province those areas of the country inhabited by Bengalis which were then parts of the Assam and Bihar provinces.

These movements reflected the growth of national consciousness among representatives of the large linguistic communities of India that was a natural consequence of the economic and socio-cultural processes of their national consolidation, which had accelerated in the second quarter of the twentieth century.

Germany's military successes on the Western front in the spring and summer of 1940 weakened Britain's military and political position; this state of affairs in its turn influenced the situation obtaining in India. In July 1940 at its Poona meeting the All-India Congress Committee reiterated in a special resolution its readiness to support the British war effort on condition that a) the British Government declared that India would be granted independence after the war and b) that a responsible government be set up.

In August these proposals were transmitted to the Viceroy. Making the most of Britain's serious military setbacks, the leadership of the National Congress attempted to bring new pressure to bear on the British in the hope of gaining certain concessions. However the colonial authorities were meanwhile merely biding their time, choosing the opportune moment for an all-out onslaught against the national movement.

In October 1940 Gandhi announced a civil disobedience campaign. It was conducted on the basis of "individual *satyagraha*": National Congress members specially appointed by Gandhi were to deliver anti-war speeches in public places or to shout out pacifist slogans. The list of those chosen for this task, which included a large section of the Congress activists, fell into the hands of the police, which succeeded in waylaying one by one those to be involved in the *satyagraha*; thus close on twenty thousand Congress members were put behind the bars. After this the Party was not in a position to carry out any effective work until the end of 1941.

Subhash Bose who had ceased to deem it possible to overthrow British rule relying solely on revolutionary forces within India and held that a decisive military rout of Britain was no longer far off, pinned his hopes on nazi Germany and her allies. In the spring of 1941 Bose illegally crossed the Indian-Afghan frontier, made his way to Berlin and from there was sent on to Japan. He naively believed that Britain's military opponents would bring India deliverance from foreign oppression, albeit on the end of a bayonet.



The Position in the Country in the Summer of 1942.  
The Cripps Mission

Nazi Germany's attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941 and the USSR's entry into the war changed its character radically. These events also affected the stand adopted by the Indian Communists. Along with a continuing struggle for independence, the Communist Party of India now began advocating turning the war against the Axis powers into a people's war. This led it to oppose any interruption of arms production. A fierce ideological struggle with regard to these matters started up both between the Communists and the Congress members and also between the Communists and various other Left groups, mainly those of Trotskyite leanings.

At the 19th meeting of the All-India Trade Union Congress in Cawnpore (February 1942) differences in interpretations of the war's implications and attitudes to be adopted to Britain's war effort resulted in the Left-radical wing—consisting mainly of Bengalis led by M. N. Roy, V. B. Karnik and others—leaving the organisation. The trade-union leaders who thus broke away from the All-India Trade Union Congress set up an organisation of their own known as the Indian Labour Federation, which meant a further split in the country's trade-union movement.

The growing ideological and political differences in the national movement, the split within the trade-union movement, and the arrest of a large number of activists in the national organisations, all had a negative effect on the mass struggle of the working class. In comparison with the previous year there was a marked decline in the achievements of the strike movement.

The entry of Japan's militarist regime into the war at the end of 1941 at once brought with it the threat of an invasion of Britain's colonies in Asia. This change in the strategic situation in Asia and the direct pressure brought to bear on the British Government from overseas obliged it to embark on new political manoeuvres in India.

In December 1941 the majority of those arrested for their participation in the *satyagraha* campaign were released from prison, and in March 1942 Sir Stafford Cripps, Lord Privy Seal, arrived in India with a special mission to present new British proposals to the leaders of the Congress. These could be summarised as follows: 1) For the duration of the war the status quo was to be preserved in India but after the war the country would become a dominion; 2) Immediately after the war elections would be held at which deputies to a constituent assembly would also be elected, an assembly which would also include representatives of the princely states appointed by their rulers. The constituent assembly would draw up a new constitution for the dominion; 3) Some of the provinces and

principalities could remain within the British Empire as independent dominions.

This document conveyed the first clear formulation of the principles upheld by ruling circles in Britain aimed at the dismemberment and balkanisation of the Indian subcontinent.

Despite the pressure which Cripps brought to bear on the leaders of the Congress (through the leaders of other political organisations, in particular those of the communal parties), his proposals were rejected. The Cripps mission was a fiasco.

Increasing Anti-British Struggle  
in the Spring and Summer of 1942

As a result of the Japanese invasion of Burma in March 1942 and the rapid occupation of that country the menace of war was soon at India's very doorsteps. The defeat of the British army in Burma, the capture of some of the Anglo-Indian units involved, and the panic retreat of the British to India had all shown that the colonial apparatus had been ill-prepared for the defence of the country in face of the Japanese invasion and at the same time served to exacerbate existing political tension.

It was at this stage that a shift to more active forms of struggle in the tactics of the National Congress was to be observed. In one of his articles published in April 1942 in the weekly *Harijan*, Gandhi first used the slogan: "Quit India!" which conveyed the demand that India be given immediate independence. The Congress Working Committee at its meeting in Wardha (Bombay province) adopted a resolution on July 6 in which it accepted the defence of India by the British armed forces, but at the same time approved the slogan: "Quit India!"

In response to this resolution Gandhi declared that the struggle to implement it would take the form of a mass civil disobedience campaign, which might go beyond the limits of non-violence. This was a direct threat addressed to the British.

On August 7 the AICC session in Bombay decided to start a new non-co-operation campaign. However, within the next two days the Congress leaders, including Gandhi, and the leaders of the provincial organisations had been arrested, accused of preparing a conspiracy aimed at overthrowing the colonial regime. The accusation was based on false evidence fabricated by the police. After this move an official ban was placed on Congress activity.

The arrest of the National Congress leaders when India was under threat of war with Japan sparked off spontaneous anti-British demonstrations on a mass scale. During August and early September spontaneous demonstrations and protest strikes (or *hartals*) broke out in many parts of the country. Detachments of youths, led usually by Communists and Left Congressists, attacked hundreds of railway stations, post offices and police stations, destroying lines of



communication, blowing up road and railway bridges. These outbreaks were on a particularly large scale in Bihar, the eastern part of the United Provinces and the Satara district of the Bombay province. In the Ballia and Azamgarh districts (United Provinces) a regular guerilla war started up against the punitive forces of the colonial administration.

However, all this activity was spontaneous in character and was not co-ordinated, lacking as it did a unifying centre. The poorly armed insurgents were unable to withstand the onslaught of the soldiers and police of the colonial regime. The authorities initiated cruel reprisals against those involved in the anti-British demonstrations: more than two thousand people were killed and close on sixty thousand people arrested. In many places concentration camps were set up at which Indian freedom fighters were subsequently interned.

The "August Revolution" of 1942 (the mass action of the summer of that year came to be known by this term) ended in defeat, but it reflected the important shift in the national movement, its members' new readiness to take up arms in the fight for freedom, despite the fact that they had been brought up in the spirit of Gandhi's doctrine of non-violence.

The economic struggle of the working class also intensified to some extent at this juncture: in 1942 the number of strikes increased from the previous year's total of 359 to 694, and the number of those taking part grew in its turn from 291,000 to 772,000, while the total number of lost man-days rose from 3,000,000 to 5,700,000.

Peasant demonstrations against the landlords also became more frequent in the United Provinces, Bihar, North-West Frontier Province, Bengal and Orissa.

The mass struggle of the working people was advancing at a point when the economic position of the country was steadily deteriorating.

#### THE ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL SITUATION IN INDIA IN THE LAST YEARS OF THE WAR (1943-1945)

##### Famine in Eastern India. The Peasants' Struggle

The poor harvests which hit a number of regions in India in 1943 and 1944 led to a marked drop in food stocks and mass famine, that was particularly serious in Bengal and certain parts of Bihar and Orissa. The famine of 1943-1944 stemmed not so much from a shortage of local produce as from the poor distribution machinery of the British administration and the continuing export of cereals despite the harvest failure: when India herself was short of four million tons, a million tons of food grain was exported.

Food prices started to rise rapidly and by the middle of 1943 they were ten times higher than the pre-war level. The first victims of this

price-rise were the poor strata of Indian society, including those in the rural areas, where mass-scale impoverishment of the peasants meant that larger sums were being borrowed from money-lenders and that numerous tracts of land were falling into the hands of the *zamindars* and money-lenders.

The famine took a toll of over five million lives. In those days of mass famine which swept through a large part of the United Provinces and Eastern India, the peasant movement in those areas fell into decline. The active centre of that movement was now in the south of the country: in Tamilnad and Kerala. It was there and later in Bengal, once again, that the peasant struggle developed along new lines: the peasants started ploughing up wasteland belonging to the landlords and seizing their granaries. The development of this mass movement was influenced by the events connected with the legalisation of the Communist Party of India.

#### The CPI in 1942-1945

In July 1942 the British colonial authorities legalised the Communist Party of India. This step can to a large degree be explained by the change in the CPI's attitude to the war after the autumn of 1941. Insofar as the Indian Communists had in the changed situation put forward the slogan of the "people's war" and set themselves the task of assisting in the expanding arms production throughout the country, the step of legalising their activity undeniably promoted the consolidation of the Asian rear for the Allies, in what for them was the grimmest of the war years—1942. This step taken by ruling circles in Britain also had implications in the international arena—it represented a positive gesture towards the Soviet Union.

When they legalised the activities of the CPI the colonial authorities also hoped by doing so to bring about a split within the national movement, to set off the now legal CPI against the banned National Congress. Indeed the situation in which the Indian Communists now found themselves was difficult and demanded that they evolve sound tactics, which would at one and the same time serve the interests of the nations united in their struggle against the fascist bloc and also those of the people of India in their struggle against British colonialism.

Unlike the Congress, the CPI had not made its support of the British war effort conditional upon the establishment of a responsible government and upon other major political concessions. However, the Communist Party continued to support the principal demands of the nation as a whole, in particular the demand that a national government be set up which alone, as they pointed out quite clearly, would be able to make full use of India's potential resources in the struggle against fascism and Japanese militarism.



The CPI widely advocated united action on the part of the various forces within the national movement as the most important prerequisite of success in the struggle against imperialism. It was from this angle that the Indian Communists approached the need for agreement between the National Congress and the Muslim League.

At this particular stage, as was later acknowledged by the Communist Party of India, certain mistakes were made, both with regard to the Party's political platform and also to the implementation of the tactics they adopted, mistakes which served not to promote but rather undermine the unity of the anti-imperialist forces. The CPI's Central Committee took a negative view of the "August Revolution" and also supported the "Lahore Resolution" drawn up by the Muslim League on the setting up of sovereign states in those regions where Moslems constituted the majority of the population. Despite a resolution drawn up by the CPI's Central Committee in September 1942, which put forward demands for the release of Gandhi and other leaders, an end to repressive measures, the legalisation of the National Congress and the creation of a Provisional National Government, relations between CPI members and the Congress leaders continued to deteriorate. This development can also in part be explained by the considerable successes scored by the CPI in 1942-1945 as it succeeded in extending and consolidating its influence within mass-scale public organisations.

In the first months after the CPI's activity had been made legal its members were obliged to work in difficult conditions. A large number of the Central Committee leaders were still in prison. However, in the summer of 1942, despite the CPI's official stand on armed struggle against the colonial regime, considerable numbers of its activists were arrested in many parts of the country, who to some degree or other had been involved in such activities. Yet the legalisation of the party brought about fundamental changes in the conditions in which its work was carried out. Above all it meant that regular publication of party periodicals was now possible.

In July 1942 the Party started putting out a weekly in English (and later in eleven Indian languages) entitled *People's War* which in practice served as a collective Party co-ordinator. In Bombay where the Party headquarters was situated, various propaganda brochures and other materials were put out by the Party publishing house. Despite bans imposed by the colonial authorities the pages of the newspaper provided wide coverage of the labour, peasant and democratic movements throughout the country: it gave readers information concerning the position on the various fronts of the Second World War, and the heroic struggle the Red Army was waging against the fascist aggressors. Soon after this newspaper started to appear it was subjected to repression from the colonial authorities: fines, confiscation of copies, searches of the printing house and editorial offices, arrests of those engaged in the distribution of Party publications, etc. Reactionary groups organised attacks against the

printing house and attempted to burn it down. Despite these setbacks the *People's War* continued to spread the ideas of scientific communism among the masses of the working people.

On May 23, 1943, the first CPI conference was opened in Bombay. It formulated the political line the Party planned to follow, elected a new Central Committee led by P.C. Joshi. There was a marked increase in the membership of the CPI even during the first year of its legal activity (from 4,000 in 1942 to 16,000 in May 1943). In the years that followed, its membership continued to grow as also did its mass support: in January 1944 the Party already had 30,000 members, and this figure had risen to 53,000 by the middle of 1946.

### The Mass Movement in 1943-1945

The Communists saw as their main task the extension and consolidation of their mass support. The growth of their influence in the trade-union, peasant and other mass organisations proceeded against a background of growing conflicts with the Congressists, above all the Socialists among them, but also with other political groups.

At the twentieth session of the All-India Trade Union Congress (held in Nagpur in May 1943) neither the political resolution proposed by the supporters of the National Congress, nor the resolution put forward by the Communists secured the majority laid down in the AITUC charter, a fact which pointed to a new "balance of power" between the main AITUC contenders for influence over the masses. An indication of the consolidation of the Communists' position was the election of S.A. Dange as chairman of the AITUC and that of N.M. Joshi, a democrat sympathetic to the CPI, as General Secretary.

The factional struggle within the Trade Union Congress and also the dissenting stand of the Indian Labour Federation that had come into being back in 1941 had an adverse effect upon the economic struggle of the working class: compared to 1941/42 the overall number of lost man-days dropped to 2,300,000 in 1943 and to 3,400,000 in the following year. Only a little over half a million white- and blue-collar workers were involved in the strikes organised in those two years.

Another salient feature of the strikes organised during the last years of the war was their shorter duration: this can be explained partly by the difficult conditions in which the workers found themselves during the famine years of 1943-1944, and also by the anti-worker policy pursued by the colonial authorities. In 1942 and 1943 the holding of strikes was virtually banned in special amendments to the Defence of India Act. In response to recommendations made by the International Labour Organisation, special provisions were made for discussion of various aspects of labour conflicts and, in particular, aspects of labour legislation: tri-partite conferences on labour, in which twenty



people would take part: ten nominated by the authorities and five nominated by the employers' organisations and the trade unions respectively.

However, despite an outright ban by the government the strikes continued and by the end of the war the strike movement was gaining new ground. The economic struggle of the working class led by the AITUC centred its efforts on demands put forward in the resolution adopted at the Nagpur Conference calling for control over the activities of speculators and the provision of bonuses for workers in view of the rising prices. At this period the position of the AITUC improved considerably: between May 1943 and March 1945 the number of trade unions that had become affiliated to it grew from 259 to 575, and their membership rose from 332,000 to 509,000.

Meanwhile the Communists were also intensifying their work in the peasant unions that were affiliated to the All-India Kisan Sabha. In 1941-1942 first the Socialists and the Forward Bloc members left the Kisan Sabha and these were followed by a Right-wing grouping headed by N. G. Ranga. This split among the peasant unions meant a drastic drop in the Kisan Sabha membership—from 800,000 on the eve of the war to 225,000 in 1942. However, as a result of determined organisational work carried out by the Communists, together with the peasants of democratic sympathies not affiliated to any party but ready to support the Communists led by veterans of the peasant movement such as Indulal Yagnik, S. S. Sarasvati and Karyananda Sharma, the influence of the peasant unions increased conspicuously. This was also partly due to the Kisan Sabha's active support of the economic interests of the broad mass of the peasantry, particularly those who owned only small holdings or were tenant farmers. Soon the Kisan Sabha's membership began to swell again: in March 1945 it had 825,000 members. At the next conference held in the village of Netrakona (the Mymensingh district in the province of Bengal) in March 1945, Muzaffar Ahmad, one of the veterans of the Communist movement, was elected chairman.

The areas in which the peasant struggle was particularly active in 1943-1944 were Bengal, Bihar, the Punjab and also Tanjore in the Madras province in the south of the country, the northern districts of that province inhabited by Andhras (Telugu-speaking people), the Malabar coast inhabited by the Malayalis. The most active participants in all these struggles were the tenant farmers, who not only demanded changes in the conditions of tenure that put them at a serious disadvantage but also started openly seizing arable lands.

In the course of the mass struggle of the working class and the peasantry, the active efforts of the AITUC and the Kisan Sabha, and also the far more intense work of the youth (student) and women's organisations led by Communists, many representatives of the Left wing of the Congress Socialists gradually came to accept the principles of scientific socialism and joined the CPI. This develop-

ment during the war years was particularly marked in the southern regions of the country—in Andhra, Kerala and also in the United Provinces.

### **The Political Situation in the Country at the End of the War**

In view of the fact that the mass movement continued its activities despite repressive measures and the Left forces were consolidating their position in the mass organisations, the British imperialists were led to embark on new political manoeuvres at the end of the war. The extremely unpopular Viceroy Linlithgow was replaced in October 1943 by Wavell. On May 6, 1944 Gandhi was released from prison as also were other Congress leaders.

In order to seize the political initiative the British authorities, using Wavell as mediator, organised a series of negotiations between Gandhi and Jinnah to discuss conditions for a future post-war settlement in India. During these negotiations the British succeeded in aggravating still further the differences between the National Congress and the Muslim League.

Under pressure from public opinion which demanded that agreement be reached between the National Congress and the Muslim League, a second round of negotiations was held in September 1944 between the leaders of the two organisations. This time the go-between was the so-called "Sapru Committee" named after its chairman, the leader of the Liberal Federation.

One of the leaders of the National Congress C. Rajagopalachari sent Jinnah proposals that can be summarised as follows: 1) the National Congress should agree to the creation of Pakistan but only after independence had been achieved; 2) the question of Pakistan should be decided by a plebiscite; 3) pending a final political settlement in the country a provisional government should be set up in which the Muslim League should without fail participate.

In August 1944, at a meeting of the Muslim League Council in Karachi, a resolution was passed authorising M. A. Jinnah to negotiate with Gandhi. The discussion between the two leaders was conducted in writing (between September 21 and 27, 1944). The negotiations came to nothing, for Jinnah insisted that Congress accept the Pakistan formula as one of the conditions for a political settlement before the attainment of independence.

However under pressure from rank-and-file organisations affiliated to the Congress or the League, in which the drive towards unity was growing gradually stronger, an agreement was concluded between the General Secretary of the Muslim League, Liaquat Ali Khan, and the leader of the Congress Party in the Central Legislative Assembly, Bulabhai Desai, concerning the following principles for the formation of the future provisional government in India: 1) both political



organisations would receive 40 per cent of the places within it; 2) the remaining seats would be made available to the "religious minorities" (Christians, untouchables, Sikhs and Parsis); 3) a British general would remain the commander-in-chief of the armed forces; 4) the question of the partition of India and the setting up of Pakistan as a separate state would be resolved after the political status of the country had been finally determined once and for all.

This move marked a major step forward in the direction of cohesion of the anti-imperialist forces, as they made ready for the new decisive battle with the British colonial regime.

## **THE FINAL STAGE IN THE STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE (1945-1947)**

### **THE MASS MOVEMENT IN 1945-1946 AND THE POLITICAL MANOEUVRING OF THE BRITISH IMPERIALISTS**

A number of factors in the international arena at the end of the war began to exert a conspicuous influence on affairs in India: the defeat of Nazi Germany and its allies, the marked growth in the international authority and influence of the Soviet Union, which had made the all-important contribution to the rout of the fascist aggressors, the revolutionary changes which had begun in those countries of Central and South-Eastern Europe that had been liberated by the Soviet Army and the consolidation of democratic forces in the countries of Western Europe. The weakened position of the colonial powers in Africa and Asia that had begun to make itself felt during the course of the war reflected the mounting crisis now facing the whole of the imperialist colonial system.

The struggle to drive out the Japanese invaders and also to resist the attempts by the British, French and Dutch bourgeoisie to re-establish their colonial regimes in the countries of South-East Asia revolutionised the political situation within India itself.

Growing class and national contradictions in the country were also bound up with economic changes that had taken place during the war years.

### **The Enhanced Strength of the National Bourgeoisie**

The expansion of war production had had a favourable effect on Indian industry. In comparison with the pre-war period there had been an almost 25 per cent increase in the total industrial output by 1943. Admittedly those spheres of industry benefiting directly from military orders were in a particularly advantageous situation (metallurgy, the cotton and chemical industries) but the war situation also played into the hands of those spheres of industry providing for the needs of the over 500,000-strong British army stationed in India (such as the catering industry). In addition to the large factories, manufactories and cottage industries were also able to expand, for they too received orders from the war department.

Thanks to the large profits resulting from the military orders the Indian bourgeoisie was able to accumulate sizeable capital. The total of their deposits made in the Indian joint-stock banks increased



several times over after the war began. Traders and money-lenders were also in a position to accumulate considerable capital over the same period—by exploiting the peasants, the small-scale producers, artisans and craftsmen.

Indian businessmen after consolidating their own financial resources began, through the purchase of shares, to penetrate spheres of industry which had formerly been for the most part the province of British capital—namely the tea plantations, and the jute industry, to name two examples. Influential figures in the Indian business world began to set up more and more mixed companies in the leading branches of industry—such as the chemical industry or car production. Indian monopolist groups—Tata, Birla, Dalmia-Jain and others—started to emerge as junior partners in British monopolist companies. Indian big bourgeoisie began actively to penetrate the more developed of the princely states (Baroda, Gwalior, Mysore, Jaipur) whose rulers became shareholders in the industrial companies set up in their territories.

#### **The Weakened Economic Position of the British Bourgeoisie and Conflict of Interests Between the British and the Americans in India**

The growing business activity of Indian traders and industrialists and the stronger position of the Indian bourgeoisie, both in the provinces of British India and also in the princely states, developed as the position of British capital in the country grew somewhat weaker. During the war the repatriation of British capital had accelerated, and it no longer enjoyed a monopoly in several spheres of trade and industry.

Major changes had taken place in financial settlements between India and Britain. In 1939 a special Anglo-Indian agreement had been drawn up concerning payments for Indian military supplies, according to which the British Government received these on credit, registered in special accounts in the Bank of England. In this way the British bourgeoisie was able to make maximum use of India's material and manpower resources during the war, without any extra burden on Britain's own budget. At the same time the Indian public "debt" to Britain that had come into being back in the nineteenth century was written off as part of the Indian sterling reserves. The debt had embraced spending on colonial wars, etc., which the British Government listed as expenditures incurred by India. Blocked sterling reserves which in 1945 had reached a sum of over a thousand million pounds sterling could be used by Britain to bring her influence to bear on the course of India's post-war economic development. Nevertheless, the existence of large reserves of foreign currency and the

liquidation of the Indian "debt" undeniably served to consolidate the economic position of the national bourgeoisie.

During the Second World War American capitalists, turning to their advantage the economic, military and political problems with which Britain was now faced, and the new absence of Japanese competition, began to go all out to penetrate the promising Indian market. Through the American economic and technical missions, that had been sent to India during the war, via the lend-lease deliveries and also other channels the American bourgeoisie made a detailed study of the country's economy and established contact with Indian industrialists and traders. By the end of the war the US share of Indian exports had grown from eight to 21 per cent and that of Indian imports from the USA from six to 25 per cent. The growing competition between Britain and America within the Indian market served to strengthen the position of the national bourgeoisie vis-à-vis the British monopolies.

The Indian national bourgeoisie which had grown rich thanks to the military orders it had received (this applied particularly to its upper echelons) was keenly aware of the oppressive restrictions inherent in the colonial regime, which hindered it from realising the capital it had in the meantime succeeded in accumulating, and stood in the way of the free development of Indian capitalist enterprise. The decline in industrial production that had begun in 1944 aggravated these contradictions still further.

#### **Growing Class Contradictions**

The halting of military orders led to a decline in production, the closing down of factories and mass sackings. Entrepreneurs tried to shift their losses onto the working class, refusing to pay out bonuses and dearness allowances in the wake of rising prices. Craftsmen and workers from the manufactories found themselves in a difficult position, since small-scale production was particularly affected by the decline in the health of the market. Mass desertion of the starving villages by the peasants in 1943-1944 led to a marked increase in the numbers of unemployed, which immediately had an adverse effect upon the conditions of wage-labour.

Poor harvests of food and cash crops in the 1944/45 agricultural year gave rise to a shortage of several types of raw material. The authorities acknowledged that regions inhabited by close on a hundred million people were threatened with famine. The shortage of food and other consumer goods led to increased prices and speculation, which brought increased financial hardships to workers, clerks and other strata of the working population in town and country.

Deterioration of the economic position of the bulk of the population led to an exacerbation of class contradictions. In an atmosphere of



widespread discontent, increased activity on the part of the mass organisations inevitably led to more intense class struggle in the country.

In all strata of Indian society the awareness of the need to put an end to the colonial regime was rapidly gaining ground. This was why the class conflicts in the country without fail began to assume an anti-imperialist character. The British colonial regime in India was now only supported by the feudal landlords, princes and the comprador elements of the bourgeoisie.

### British Policy in India in 1945

British ruling circles, in an attempt to sustain their colonial regime in India continued to pin their hopes on the growing differences between the main political parties—the National Congress and the Muslim League. In May 1945 Wavell announced, after making a trip to London, the plan to set up an Executive Council under the Viceroy consisting of representatives from the Indian political parties. In June he held talks with representatives of the National Congress and the Muslim League in the town of Simla (where the Viceroy had his summer residence). Congress leaders—Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhai Patel, Maulana Azad—were released from prison before the conference in which they and Gandhi then took part.

Wavell put forward his plan for the formation of an Executive Council, which did not appear to differ from the formula for an agreement proposed by Liaquat Ali Khan and B. Desai. However, the proposals with which Wavell had come forward provided that seats in the Council would be reserved not for political parties as such but for the religious communities. This was unacceptable for both parties. The National Congress did not see itself as a Hindu organisation, but rather as a nation-wide secular organisation; the Muslim League, on the other hand, claimed that it alone represented Indian Moslems and could therefore not accept that Moslem members of the Congress be admitted to the Council. Moreover, it had also been suggested that the proposed Executive Council should be responsible only to the British Crown and Parliament.

The negotiations in Simla ended in failure; however, the colonial administration placed the blame for this failure at the door of the Indian political parties, who had participated in the talks. The British imperialists were hoping that a further worsening of the differences between the Congress and the League and also the overall deterioration of Hindu-Moslem relations in the country would make it possible to retain the colonial regime in India.

The Labour victory at the first post-war elections in Britain in 1945 did not at first give rise to any major changes in British policy in India. In July Wavell was called to Britain and after his return the first announcement from Attlee's Government relating to its Indian policy

was made known simultaneously in London and Delhi (September 19, 1945). It was stated that the Labour Government would implement the measures outlined in the Cripps proposals of 1942. It was also announced that elections would be held to the Central and provincial legislatures in the winter of 1945/46. However, major amendments to the plans of the British Government were soon made by mass anti-colonial action.

### Mass Action in the Autumn of 1945 and Early 1946

The strike movement was given a new lease of life in the middle of 1945. A new development in the mass labour movement at this time was the political character which more and more of the strikes assumed; the economic struggle of the working class was now being co-ordinated with the political demonstrations of the students and other groups of the working population. This trend in the activities of the labour movement explains the resolutions adopted by the 21st Session of the AITUC held in January 1945, in Madras. At that session there was unanimous support for a resolution on the political situation proposed by one of the most prominent figures in the trade-union movement, Congress member V. V. Giri; it called for the granting of India's independence. Since the intensive activity of the national-liberation movement had begun, the AITUC had not only led the economic struggle of the working class throughout the country but it had also channelled that struggle along the course already charted out by the broad democratic movement against the colonial regime. In the course of that struggle conditions began gradually to favour the consolidation of co-operation between the various political factions within the trade-union organisations. The Communists were in the forefront of this struggle for unity and this enhanced their influence within the organised labour movement even further.

During the second half of 1945 strikes and demonstrations began to develop into armed clashes with troops and police. The first major clash with the police took place in August in Varanasi. This was followed by unrest in Bombay which was skilfully steered by agents-provocateurs of the colonial administration along a course that ended in Hindu-Moslem riots that continued for several days. This was the first serious clash between the two religious communities after the war; after provoking it in the first place the British colonialists continued their efforts to undermine the recently consolidated unity of Hindus and Moslems in the anti-imperialist struggle.

Two events in the autumn of 1945 added to the internal tension and helped to advance still further the unfolding of the mass anti-colonial movement. In response to an appeal from the leaders of the National Congress, the Muslim League, the Communist



Party and other mass organisations, rallies and demonstrations were organised throughout the country to protest at the decision of the British Government to use units of the Anglo-Indian army to assist France and Holland in their efforts to suppress the national liberation movement in the countries of South-East Asia. Political action to mark "Indonesia Day" was organised throughout the country on October 25: Indian dockers refused to load ships that were due to set sail in that direction with military cargoes.

In November there began in Delhi the trial of a group of officers from the Indian National Army (INA) that had been set up during the war by Bose from among captive men of the Anglo-Indian army held in Burma. Bose himself escaped from Burma in 1945 and during a flight to Japan was killed in an air disaster. The Indian public considered Bose and his associates to be champions of national independence who had taken up arms against the colonial regime. Bose was particularly popular in Bengal, his native province, where the "Forward Bloc" originally organised by him was still active. He was known there as none other than *Netaji* or leader.

The sentencing by the British military tribunal of Shah Nawaz Khan, the chief of staff of the INA, and two other officers to long terms of imprisonment aroused profound indignation among the patriotic Indians of Calcutta. Mass demonstrations there developed into a general political strike in which workers, students, traders and artisans took part. Barricades mushroomed in the streets. As a result of the strike organised by transport and municipal workers, the city was left without water and light. Clashes with the police and troops continued from the 22nd to the 25th of November; dozens of demonstrators were killed and hundreds of them wounded. Only interference from Congress leaders, Sarat Ch. Bose (brother of *Netaji*) included, brought the strike to an end. From Calcutta the protest movement spread to Bombay and some other cities of India.

The colonial authorities continued trials of INA officers; in February 1946 one more Moslem officer was condemned to imprisonment. The November 1945 events reoccurred in Calcutta with redoubled force. The *hartal* declared by the Bengali student organisation on February 11 marked the beginning of a new general strike which went on till February 15 and was attended by clashes with the police. The streets were covered with barricades. From Calcutta the unrest spread to Bombay and many large towns of North-West India. Panic spread among the British and large units of troops were sent out to put down anti-government demonstrations and rallies.

Action in defence of the INA were supported on this occasion not only by the National Congress but also by the Muslim League. Despite numerous attempts the British were unable this time to provoke any Hindu-Moslem clashes.

The deteriorating economic situation gave rise to a new wave of strikes at the beginning of 1946. At this stage workers from the princely states were also being drawn into the strike movement: at the Kolar gold mines of Mysore and the textile factories in Gwalior, for instance.

The following table illustrates the growth of the strike movement:

Year	Number of strikes	Number of strikers (thousands)	Number of lost man-days (millions)
1945	850	800	3.8
1946 (first quarter)	426	580	3.0

Political unrest also spread to the villages. As early as the autumn of 1945 mass action against the colonial regime had reached its highest form—armed struggle. The climax of this political ferment came in February 1946 when sections of the armed forces began to be drawn into the movement.

#### Mutiny in the Navy. The Emergence of a Revolutionary Situation in India

In 1946 a spontaneous mutiny broke out among the sailors on board the training ship *Talwar* (Sword): prior to this they had submitted a report complaining of the bad food they were given (the seamen had been given rice mixed with sand). An attempt by the commanding officers to initiate reprisals against those who had handed in the complaint triggered off a strike by the whole crew that began on February 18. The next day the strike was joined by the crew of all twenty warships at anchor in the same area. The striking sailors demanded an end to racial discrimination in the navy, that conditions of service for Indian sailors be equated to those of their British counterparts, and finally that conditions of life on board be improved, particularly with regard to food. They also protested against the insults to which Indian sailors had been subjected by British officers.

On February 19 the strikers organised a demonstration in Bombay, after first electing a strike committee. The action undertaken by the Indians in the navy was now assuming a political character: apart from the above demands concerning improved conditions of service, the strikers also raised two other issues, demanding that all political prisoners be released and that Anglo-Indian troops be withdrawn from Indonesia.

This demonstration of anti-colonial protest was united under three banners—those of the National Congress, the Muslim League and the



Communist Party—thus symbolising the endeavour to bring together the main anti-imperialist forces.

On February 20 army units were brought to Bombay to put down the mutiny. The sailors from the mutinous ships co-ordinated their activities and an executive committee of five men was elected.

The next day British troops launched an offensive. Fire was exchanged between the two sides and an artillery duel was kept up. During the fighting neither side gained an appreciable advantage over its opponent and at four o'clock in the afternoon an armistice was announced.

News of the mutiny spread quickly throughout the country. Naval ratings came out in support of the strikers in Karachi, Calcutta, Madras and Visakhapatnam, and also employees of the coast guard in Delhi, Thana and Poona. It looked as if the mutiny might spread throughout the Royal Indian Navy.

The situation was further complicated by the fact that air force pilots and aerodrome personnel in Bombay had also been on strike since the beginning of February, in order to protest against racial discrimination and accelerate demobilisation. They were joined by pilots from Calcutta and a number of other air bases.

This action in the Anglo-Indian army and navy met with wholehearted support from democratic forces. In response to a call by the Communist Party, a general strike, demonstrations and a mass rally began on February 22. Despite the peaceful character of this action undertaken by the working people of Bombay large detachments of soldiers and police were sent out against the demonstrators, who were subjected to severe reprisals. Close on three hundred people were killed and 1,700 wounded.

Armed action in which the army was involved and the active role of the Communists in it alarmed not only the colonial administration but also the leaders of bourgeois-landlord groupings within the national organisations. The leaders of the National Congress and the Muslim League who had assured the insurgent sailors of their sympathy and support for their main demands called upon them nevertheless to put an end to the strike and resistance to the authorities. Patel, representing the leaders of the National Congress, arrived in Bombay for talks with the executive committee of the insurgent sailors.

Under pressure from the leaders of the Congress and the League the strike committee capitulated on February 23. However, in some parts of the country the strikes by soldiers and sailors continued for a few more days.

This action within the Indian armed forces made it clear that a revolutionary situation was taking shape in India.

### **The Policy of the Labour Party in India. Moves to Dismember the Country**

Unable to ignore these events in India the Labour Government found itself obliged to make concessions to the national liberation movement in that country. In February a Cabinet Mission left for India; it consisted of Pethwick-Lawrence, the Secretary of State for India, First Lord of the Admiralty Alexander and Cripps, then president of the Board of Trade. On March 15, 1946 Attlee read a second declaration of Labour Party policy with regard to India, who was now to be granted dominion status. In this announcement Attlee acknowledged that the movement for independence was nation-wide, and that the army was involved in it. At the end of March the Cabinet Mission arrived in India. There then began long deliberations with the leaders of the National Congress and the Muslim League which lasted for the whole of April. The stand adopted by both parties was influenced by the results of the elections to the provincial legislatures held at the beginning of April 1946.

These elections in which less than 13 per cent of the population took part and which were conducted on the basis of an electoral college system served to bring relations between the religious communities to the forefront of public attention. The National Congress secured an absolute majority in the general (Hindu) electorate in all provinces, and in the Moslem it secured a majority only in the North-West Frontier Province. The Muslim League secured a majority in the Moslem electoral college in all provinces where the majority of the population was Hindu, and also in Bengal where Moslems constituted the majority of the population. In two other provinces where the bulk of the population was Moslem—the Punjab and Sind—votes in the Moslem electoral college were divided between the Muslim League and local parties in opposition to it.

The elections showed firstly that the vast majority of the voters was in favour of retaining a united India; secondly, the creation of Pakistan proposed by the Muslim League appeared attractive to the majority of Moslem voters in provinces where the vast majority of the population was non-Moslem; thirdly, the Muslim League now enjoyed firm support within the Moslem community throughout India.

The National Congress had secured only 930 seats in the provincial legislatures, while the Muslim League had won 497; however, the League was only in a position to form a provincial government in Bengal.

Although, as noted earlier, only a small part of India's population had the right to vote, these voters constituted, as a rule, the most politically conscious section of the population and exerted an all-important influence on the formation of public opinion. It was on this occasion that the Communist Party of India was involved in elections for the first time. It put forward 108 candidates, nine of



whom were elected; all in all the Communist Party gained close on 700,000 votes. In its election manifesto the party outlined a broad programme of social change: the confiscation of landed estates, the nationalisation of major branches of industry, the introduction of a system of workers' control over large factories, etc. The programme also specified that the national question be resolved on the basis of each nationality's right to self-determination, and that democratic elections to a constituent assembly should be held. The ultimate goal in the struggle was declared to be complete independence for India. Despite the fact that the position of the Communist Party was still weak, the Party's participation in the elections served to acquaint wide sections of the Indian public with communist policy and principles.

The results of the elections made the leaders of the National Congress more determined than ever to uphold the unity of India, and at the same time convinced the leaders of the Muslim League that they should press ahead for the creation of Pakistan.

The talks during which the British mission skilfully exploited contradictions between the Congress and the League ended in a fiasco. On May 16, 1946 a declaration was published by the British Government, in which, although the idea of dividing India was formally rejected, there were nevertheless references to the danger of the Moslem minority being swallowed up by the Hindu majority in a united dominion. In view of this the government put forward the following "compromise plan":

- 1) The dominion of India would consist of a union of provinces and princely states, possessing the widest possible autonomy. The central government would only remain responsible for matters of defence, foreign policy and communications;

- 2) The provinces of British India would be united in three zones: the first, in which Hindus would predominate, would consist of provinces in the North, centre and South of the country; the second zone in the West would embrace provinces with a mainly Moslem population—the Punjab, Sind and the North-West Frontier Province; the third or Eastern zone would consist of the provinces of Bengal and Assam, where Moslems also constituted the majority of the population. In each zone a zonal government would be set up;

- 3) The constituent assembly which would consist of deputies elected by the provincial legislatures and also appointed by the princes would draw up a constitution for the whole of India, and constitutions for the three zones would be drawn up within the three sections of the constituent assembly by deputies from the provinces concerned;

- 4) Elections to the constituent assembly would be held on the basis of three electoral colleges: Hindu, Moslem and Sikh (one deputy per million inhabitants). Ratification of each article of the draft constitution would require the approval not only of an absolute majority in the

plenary session of the constituent assembly, but also by a majority of deputies from the Hindu and Moslem electoral colleges.

The British proposals provided for the creation of working conditions for the constituent assembly of a kind, which would have impeded and eventually made impossible agreement between the Congress and the League. Despite all their provisos it was clear that British ruling circles were inclined to support the Muslim League in its efforts to dismember the country by setting up the separate state of Pakistan. The programme of the Muslim League did not conflict with the interests of the British imperialists, who being no longer in a position to prolong India's colonial status, were now hatching plans for a political "solution" that would severely weaken the country both economically and militarily and thus make it easier to prolong India's dependence on her former British rulers.

Meanwhile the colonial administration was taking steps to stave off the resolution of the question as to India's future status by any other means, and at the same time to draw out as long as possible the "transfer of power".

## ON THE ROAD TO FREEDOM

### The Formation of an Interim Government. Growing Tension in the Internal Situation

The Congress and the League reacted to the proposals of the Cabinet Mission in quite different ways. The leaders of the Muslim League not only approved the British plan, but also agreed to take part in the interim government, the formation of which was also announced by Wavell on May 16. The Muslim League was attracted by the fact that the interim government was to be set up on the basis of electoral colleges: candidates would be put up for the Moslem electoral college only by the Muslim League and those for the Hindu electoral college accordingly by the National Congress.

This last point was rejected by the National Congress on the grounds that their organisation was a secular one. The leaders of the Congress held an additional round of talks with the Cabinet Mission and the Viceroy in an attempt to introduce certain amendments to the British proposals. However, after it was made clear that the Mission's plan either had to be accepted as it stood or rejected, the leaders saw themselves obliged to accept the British proposals as the basis for drafting the constitution.

Insofar as the Congress refused to be a party to the interim government, which was set up as an executive committee under the Viceroy without accountability to a constituent assembly, the League announced that it accepted the proposal to form such a government. However, the Viceroy turned down the offer by the League and formed an executive committee from civil servants.



In this situation the Muslim League council announced its refusal not only to participate in the interim government but also in the work of the constituent assembly. The League announced that it would now embark on an open struggle for the creation of Pakistan.

Although elections to the constituent assembly were held in June, its opening was obstructed by the fact that its two largest factions, apart from the Congress—the League and the Sikhs—boycotted its work. This development played into the hands of the British. Since the majority of the deputies from the North-West Frontier Province and Assam were opposed to the partition of the country on the basis of religious communities, this complicated the implementation of the plan for the creation of “Moslem” zones in the east and west.

In June Jawaharlal Nehru was elected President of the Congress in place of Azad; the Viceroy offered him the opportunity to form an interim government that would provide his Executive Council, in which Nehru would be Vice-Premier, while the Viceroy would remain head of the government. This proposal was accepted and on August 24 the composition of the new Executive Council was announced; while Nehru was Vice-Premier the ministers included prominent Congress leaders Vallabhai Patel and Rajendra Prasad and also representatives of the Christian, Sikh and Parsi communities.

Despite the restricted competence of the interim government, the first steps it took, particularly in the sphere of foreign policy, showed that its policies differed markedly from those of the colonial administration.

The reaction of the League to the formation of this government was violent in the extreme. Jinnah viewed this development as an act of treachery on the part of the British vis-à-vis the Moslems and declared that August 16 marked the beginning of the struggle for the creation of Pakistan. In Calcutta large-scale Hindu-Moslem riots were sparked off, which then spread to neighbouring Bihar and Bengal. Riots also broke out in Bombay.

Gandhi at this juncture spoke out in sharp condemnation of the riots and visited the scene of Hindu-Moslem clashes. He encouraged the setting up of self-defence detachments, the organisers of which were, as a rule, Communists and other democrats.

In September the League entered the interim government but continued to boycott the constituent assembly. Making the most of this change in the situation the British Government suggested a change in the order of voting on the articles in the future constitution: it did not apply to those provinces, the majority of whose delegates were not attending the meeting. This gave the Muslim League the chance to prevent the constituent assembly from accepting the decision to retain a united India, a principle on which Nehru insisted.

In October 1946 the first post-war session of the National Congress was held in Meerut: Acharya J. B. Kripalani was elected President.

The session approved the political course being followed by the National Congress and spoke out in favour of India becoming a sovereign republic.

At a meeting of the constituent assembly in December 1946 Nehru announced this proposal with the reservation, however, that the monarchies should be retained in the princely states, which would be members of the Indian Union.

### The Growth of the Mass Struggle in 1946 and early 1947

Yet it was massive actions by the working people and not political manoeuvring by the national parties which compelled the colonial regime to take the final step in its retreat. During 1946 and 1947 the economic situation in India continued to deteriorate which served to fan the mass actions in towns and villages.

The summer and autumn of 1946 were marked by a number of large-scale strikes on the South Indian and North Western Railways, and in the factories and mills of Calcutta, Madras, Nagpur, Coimbatore and other industrial centres. Between September and November of that year Travancore and Cochin witnessed a general strike of the workers in the coconut processing industries (coir and copra) during which armed clashes with the police occurred at Punnappra and Vayalar. Thus, the strike movement spread to other princely states; the strikes secured widest support in Mysore and Hyderabad.

In the course of 1946 more than two thousand strikes were organised in which close on some two million workers took part. The number of man-days lost was close on thirteen million. The strike movement continued to gain ground in the first half of 1947. The most dramatic events stemming from these strikes took place in Cawnpore and Calcutta, where mass demonstrations of striking workers were shot at by the police. *Hartals* were held in both cities.

In 1946 the rural population was also drawn into the struggle. Spontaneous demonstrations by the peasants began in all provinces. In some districts they developed into armed clashes with the landlords and the police. In the United Provinces the most violent action was that in the districts of Basti and Ballia, where tenant farmers came out in protest against mass evictions, which the *zamindars* began to instigate in anticipation of agrarian reform. Preparations for such reform had begun that year.

In Bengal the *tebhaga* (literally “third part”) movement swept like fire through the countryside: this was a struggle by the tenant farmers and share-croppers (*bargadars* and *adhiars*) to achieve the lowering of rents to one-third of their harvest. It spread to eleven districts of the province and developed into a regular guerrilla war against punitive police detachments and groups of the landlords’ hired henchmen or



*gundas*. The number of those involved in the movement soon reached five million. In 1946 the struggle came to an end only after the Bengal legislature adopted a law to protect the rights of the share-croppers.

In the Punjab the centre of the agrarian movement was in the Lajpaur district where the tenant farmers, led by the Kisan Sabha, waged a campaign for lower land rent and a moratorium on peasants' debts. Another struggle against the money-lenders was that of the Warli tribe in Bombay province, as a result of which over a thousand Warlis were exempted from their debts to local money-lenders or *sahukars*.

The most resolute of all the peasant action at this time was that in the region of Telengana (Hyderabad) inhabited by Telugu-speaking people, an area where feudal oppression went hand in hand with religious and racial injustice.

The peasant uprising in Telengana which broke out spontaneously in the village of Suryapet had soon swept through a huge area, in which organs of popular power or *panchayats* were set up after the administration accountable to the ruler of Hyderabad had been driven out. The immediate cause for the uprising was the shooting down of a peasant demonstration during the funeral of a peasant leader. Self-defence detachments were set up during the uprising.

Apart from these developments in Hyderabad large-scale peasant action against the power of the feudal rulers took place in 1946 in Kashmir. In the towns of that princely state mass demonstrations calling for the elimination of the prince's administrative apparatus were organised by the "Jammu and Kashmir National Conference". The slogan "Quit Kashmir!" soon became popular in the rural areas where a mass campaign began encouraging the peasants to refuse to pay their land-revenue.

The authorities resorted to cruel measures against them. The "Conference" was forced underground and its leader Sheikh Abdullah was arrested.

Insofar as the ruler of Kashmir and the clique at the helm of the prince's administration were all Hindus, while the opposition support came from the Moslem community, the increasingly tense situation in Kashmir risked having an adverse effect on the development of Hindu-Moslem relations in the rest of India. In view of this Nehru himself visited Kashmir in June 1946, but was immediately arrested by the prince's police. A general protest strike or *hartal* broke out in the princely state. Intervention on the part of the Viceroy was required to release Nehru and restore some degree of order.

Apart from Kashmir and Hyderabad anti-feudal action (but on a much smaller scale) took place in many princely states of Rajputana and Central India.

It was against the background of these events that Congress set up a special committee in January 1947 for negotiations with the princes to discuss representation of the princely states in the constituent

assembly. It was agreed that half their representatives would be elected while the other half would be appointed by the princes. In April 1947 a conference of representatives from the Praja Parishad was held in Gwalior, which showed that the people in the princely states were actively involved in the general democratic struggle for freedom.

### **The Mountbatten Plan and the Partition of India. The Creation of Two Dominions**

A revolutionary situation had taken shape by this time. It was clear that further delay over transferring power to representatives of the Indian bourgeoisie and landlords would lead to a point when the political system set up by the British imperialists in India would collapse completely as a result of the masses' armed struggle.

On February 20, 1947 Attlee announced the Labour Government's third declaration concerning its policy on India, in which it was stated that the British would leave India not later than July 1948 and that if by that time a central government would not have been set up, then power would be handed over to the governments of the various provinces. Mountbatten was appointed the new Viceroy whose task it was to implement this plan.

Both the National Congress and the Muslim League approved the declaration. In order to complicate relations between the two parties, however, the British provoked clashes between the Hindus and the Moslems, which were particularly serious in the Punjab, where the Muslim League organised a demonstration against the local government which supported Indian unity.

In a last attempt to maintain their hold on the country the British imperialists now saw that they found themselves obliged to leave India and staked everything on its dismemberment. In April Mountbatten arrived in India and on July 3 the "Mountbatten Plan" was made public. It provided for the division of India into two dominions and can be summarised as follows:

1. Two dominions were to be set up in the subcontinent: the Indian Union and Pakistan;
2. The question as to the partition of the Punjab and Bengal on religious grounds was to be decided by separate votes cast by deputies from those parts of the provinces concerned where there was a prevailing majority of Hindus or Moslems;
3. A referendum was to be held in the North-West Frontier Province and the Silhet district of Assam, which were populated mainly by Moslems;
4. The future of Sind was to be decided by a vote to be taken in the provincial legislature;
5. The incorporation of the princely states into one of the dominions would be a question for their rulers to decide;



6. The constituent assembly would consist of two assemblies one for each dominion; they would determine the future status of the two states.

The National Congress realised that the British—supported by the League—were determined, come what may, to divide the country, and so as to avoid further bloodshed it agreed to accept the “Mountbatten Plan”.

The session of the All-India Congress Committee held in June 1947 accepted the British proposals by 157 votes to 61. At the same time the Council of the Muslim League put forward additional demands for the whole of Bengal and the whole of the Punjab to be incorporated into Pakistan.

While votes were being taken in the Punjab and Bengal, deputies from the “Hindu” districts complied with the Congress decision and voted for the division of these provinces, while deputies from the “Moslem” districts voted against partition of Bengal and the Punjab.

The outcome of the voting in Sind and the referendums in Silhet and the North-West Frontier Province showed that these territories should be included in Pakistan. At the same time the Viceroy rejected demands from Abdul Ghaffar Khan, leader of the “Red Shirts”, to the effect that a referendum also be held to determine whether or not an independent Pushtunistan be set up. The vast majority of the 15 per cent of population that enjoyed the right to vote was in favour of such a referendum.

In August 1947 the British Parliament ratified the “Mountbatten Plan” as the Independence of India Act, which came into force on August 15 of the same year.

On that day Jawaharlal Nehru raised for the first time the national flag of India over the historic Red Fort in Delhi. The heroic struggle of several generations of India’s freedom fighters had been crowned with success at last. This victory of the national revolution marked the beginning of a new period in the history of India—that of independent development.

## THE DOMINION OF INDIA

### FIRST STEPS ON THE ROAD TO INDEPENDENCE

The proclamation of India as a dominion introduced radical changes to the country’s state-legal status. Throughout the territory of the Indian Union, in which the former provinces of British India and the princely states were united on a federal basis, laws issued by the British Parliament were gradually eliminated. The Constituent Assembly began its work under the leadership of its new President Rajendra Prasad, one of the Congress leaders and associates of Gandhi.

The first government of independent India was led by Jawaharlal Nehru who combined the offices of Minister of Foreign Affairs and Defence. The majority of the ministers were members of the Indian National Congress party. In addition, B. R. Ambedkar, leader of the Scheduled Castes Federation, was appointed Minister of Law and S. P. Mookherjee, leader of the Hindu Maha Sabha, Minister of Industries and Supply.

The composition of the government of “national concentration” reflected the socio-political balance of forces within the country that grew up in the early post-Independence years. Despite the fact that Nehru was Prime Minister and still enjoyed the support of the Left elements in the Congress, the predominant influence in the government was that of the moderate conservative forces. Home Minister and Deputy Prime Minister at this time was Vallabhai Patel who by that time had become the acknowledged leader of the Right grouping within the Congress leadership, while the key economic ministries—Finance and Trade—eventually fell into the hands of Chintaman Deshmukh and T. T. Krishnamachari who had connections with powerful Indian capitalists.

The provincial legislatures that had been elected in 1946 and the provincial governments that were answerable to them also reflected the interests of the bourgeoisie and landlords now at the helm of the country.

An urgent task of the new state apparatus was to “Indianise” the administrative apparatus and the armed forces, a step which substantially curtailed British influence over domestic and foreign policies of independent India. The Indian Government succeeded in securing the withdrawal of the last contingents of British troops



from the country in February 1948; however, in 1949 there were still about a thousand British officials in the central administrative apparatus, mainly in the diplomatic service.

The British imperialists, anxious if at all possible, to maintain their position in India, hoped not only to make use of their immediate agents within the administrative apparatus, but also concentrated their efforts within the princely states, in which even after the proclamation of Independence administration remained in the hands of the local rulers. This meant that a new and urgent task facing the new Indian Government was to accelerate the integration of the princely states into the Dominion.

### **The Integration of the Princely States. The First Administrative and Territorial Reform**

In 1947 a special ministry to deal with the principalities was set up, which Vallabhai Patel was put in charge of alongside the Home Ministry. After a series of negotiations between him and the princes, a formula was evolved for incorporating the princely states into the Indian Union. Each of the rulers concerned signed an instrument of accession to the Dominion which was then deposited with the government archives.

In accordance with these treaties the princes retained their rights to all their estates, both personal and real. They could not be called to account for any actions they had perpetrated, before the treaties concerning the annexation of their territory to the Indian Union came into force. The princes were granted state pensions (totalling all in all 56 million rupees). Civil servants from the princely states were also given certain guarantees (secure employment, pensions, etc.).

At the same time the princes were stripped of their political power, and their units of fighting men were either disbanded or integrated into India's regular army. The territories formerly belonging to the princes now became part of India and they were placed under Indian jurisdiction.

Insofar as the incorporation of the princely states into India (or Pakistan), according to the articles of the Independence of India Act (1947), depended upon the desires of their rulers, many of the latter did not go out of their way to hurry to declare their intentions, hoping eventually to retain the former direct relations with the British Crown that they had always enjoyed. This opposition on the part of the princes was supported by the British, in particular Mountbatten himself, who up until June 1948 still held the post of Governor General of the Dominion. However both the clear-cut position adopted by the Indian Government on this subject, once it had offered most favourable conditions to the princes facilitating

their integration, and the anti-feudal movements that were taking shape within the princely states (particularly in Hyderabad, Kashmir, Travancore, Bhopal and Orissa) obliged the princes to hurry and sign the instruments of accession.

During the period 1947-1949, 555 of the 601 princely states were integrated into India, and the remainder became part of Pakistan. The integration of former princely states into the Indian Union took three different forms: 216 of the smaller princely states became part of neighbouring provinces (Bombay, Central Provinces, Orissa and others) constituting separate districts within those provinces; seventy princely states were incorporated into the Union as administrative units governed from the centre—either within their former borders (Bhopal, Manipur, Tripura), or as groups of princely states (Himachal Pradesh, Kutch, Vindhya Pradesh); 269 of them were grouped together as federal units, or unions of states (Pepsu—the Patiala and Eastern Punjab States Union, Rajasthan, Saurashtra, Madhya Bharat, Travancore-Cochin) or separate federal states within original borders (Hyderabad, Mysore, Jammu and Kashmir).

In the new provinces, both the princely states unions and the separate former princely states, elections to the legislatures were organised and governments accountable to these legislatures were set up. The governors—or *rajpramukhs*—representing the central power, were appointed from among the former princes.

While the former princely states were being united with India in this way, the first large-scale territorial and administrative reform was being implemented. At the same time a survey and settlement was carried out and a land revenue system introduced similar to that used in the *rayatwari* areas. Rates of land taxation in a number of the former princely states were also brought down at this time.

The integration of the princely states into the Indian Union and the administrative and revenue reforms mentioned above did a great deal to consolidate the state system and dealt a serious blow to the forces of feudalism. However the compromise solutions arrived at, the retention by the princes of large parts of their landed estates, palaces and other riches, not to mention their enormous pensions (the Nizam of Hyderabad for example was granted 5,000,000 rupees a year, and the Maharajah of Mysore 2,600,000) and also the various privileges, the appointment of various princes to the post of *rajpramukh*, etc.—all paved the way to the continued influence of the princes with regard to certain spheres of the economic, political and cultural development of their former realms.

This process of integration into the Indian Union proceeded smoothly on the whole during the period 1947-1949 with the exception of three cases: the princely states of Junagadh (in the Katiawar peninsula), Hyderabad and Kashmir where unrest broke out.



The ruler of Junagadh, who was a Moslem, declared that he intended to make his territories part of Pakistan although over half the population of the principality consisted of Hindus. This decision by the prince led to serious unrest in Junagadh that compelled the Indian Government to send troops into the princely state in February 1948 and hold a plebiscite. The vast majority of the voters came out in favour of integration into India and the ruler of the princely state fled to Pakistan.

A more serious situation took shape in the large princely state of Hyderabad. The Nizam who was also a Moslem leaning on political support from the British who had started up a press campaign calling for preservation of special status for Hyderabad and of its direct links with London, went out of his way to delay the integration of his realm into the Indian Union. It was against this background that the Indian Government concluded a special agreement with the Nizam in October 1947, providing for the preservation of the status quo for a period of one year, but prohibiting the Nizam from increasing his armed forces or seeking any outside military help, etc.

The Nizam, however, soon chose to ignore his obligations under this agreement. During 1948 large shipments of arms were sent in from Pakistan. It was soon abundantly clear that plans were underway for the creation of a military and political stronghold for the British imperialists in the centre of independent India. At the same time, however, tension was mounting within the princely state itself. Outbreaks of popular revolt against the Nizam's rule, which had begun in 1946, now developed into a peasant uprising that swept through the whole eastern part of the princely state (Telengana). In order to put down the uprising, the administration and the feudal lords mustered armed bands of *razakars* who terrorised the non-Moslem population of Hyderabad.

The influence of the peasant movement in Telengana began to spread more and more to the neighbouring northern districts of Madras province, also populated by the Andhras (Telugu). In this situation the Indian Government, anxious to prevent Hyderabad breaking away from India and also the spread of the peasant unrest to the Andhra region, delivered an ultimatum to the Nizam in September 1948, demanding among other things that he disband his *razakar* detachments. On September 13 armed forces of the Indian Union entered the princely state and succeeded in occupying it within five days. Regular Indian troops not only wiped out the *razakar* detachments, but also embarked on action against the insurgent peasants in Telengana. At the beginning of 1949 the Nizam signed an agreement providing for the incorporation of Hyderabad into the Indian Union, but allowing him to assume the title of *rajpramukh* in his former domain.

### The Beginning of Conflict between India and Pakistan over Kashmir

The worst tension at this period was that which developed in the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, where the opposition to the local ruler continued under the leadership of the National Conference. In the summer of 1947 while visiting the area, Mountbatten had attempted to persuade the ruler to accept a plebiscite, hoping that the Moslems of Kashmir, who constituted the vast majority of the population, would vote for integration into Pakistan.

British policy in Kashmir, as in Hyderabad, was aimed at fanning profound conflict of long duration between India and Pakistan.

However the British plans were foiled in September 1947 by the arrival in Kashmir of Gandhi, who had succeeded in securing release from prison of Sheikh Abdullah and an agreement between the maharaja and the leadership of the National Conference. The next move by the imperialists was to provoke direct armed conflict between India and Pakistan. On October 22, 1947 detachments of Pathan tribesmen from the North-West Frontier Province invaded Kashmir and on October 26 they were already approaching its capital, Srinagar.

The maharaja's administration collapsed, the maharaja himself fled from Srinagar, while the defence of the city was organised by popular forces led by the democratic wing of the National Conference and the Communists.

Despite opposition from Mountbatten, on October 27 Indian paratroopers were sent to Srinagar and on the following day Indian units joined battle with units of the Pakistan regular army, which had invaded Kashmir in the wake of the Pathan detachments. A long drawn-out armed conflict ensued, in which operations on both sides were supervised by British generals—commanders-in-chief of the armies in the two dominions (until the end of October one and the same man—General Okinleck—had been supreme commander of both armies!).

A government known as Azad Kashmir (Free Kashmir) was set up in the territory occupied by Pakistani forces.

On December 31, 1947 India submitted the Kashmir issue to the UN Security Council for consideration. A UN Kashmir Commission was set up; during deliberations of this body representatives of Britain and America sought to exacerbate differences between India and Pakistan. In the spring of 1948 armed conflict came to an end and a cease-fire agreement came into force on January 1, 1949.

In the autumn of 1947 after the maharaja of Kashmir had renounced his throne, his successor who had been made head of



state of the former princely state signed an agreement providing for the incorporation of Jammu and Kashmir into the Indian Union, which however at the same time accorded the new province special autonomy and left open the question as to the future status of Kashmir, that would have to be decided at some later date.

The events in Kashmir and Hyderabad added to the tension in relations between the two main religious communities in the subcontinent—Hindus and Moslems.

### **Hindu-Moslem Riots. The Death of Gandhi**

The partition of India into two dominions and the establishment of the new states' frontiers sparked off mass migrations of Hindus and Sikhs from Pakistan to India, and of Moslems to Pakistan. These mass migrations hit in particular the border regions of the two states. From the internal regions of India it was mainly representatives of the wealthy upper echelons of the commercial and industrial bourgeoisie who emigrated to Pakistan. This mass movement of Hindus and Moslems gave rise to an acute deterioration of relations between the two communities in both dominions. Plunder and destruction of refugees' dwellings and mass-scale butchery became every-day happenings. In response to the atrocities perpetrated by religious fanatics in Western Punjab against Hindu and Sikh refugees, similar actions against Moslems broke out in Rajasthan and Delhi, which then spread to Bihar and certain other regions of India.

Gandhi who had always championed Hindu-Moslem unity was deeply disturbed by these developments. As a sign of protest against the killing of Moslems he began a hunger strike. Gandhi's stand evoked widespread discontent in chauvinist Hindu circles grouped around the Hindu Maha Sabha and the closely associated para-military organisation Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sangh (Union of National Volunteers). Reactionary circles were displeased not only by Gandhi's stand on the question of Hindu-Moslem relations, but also by a certain radicalisation now to be observed in his social and political views that had occurred during the 1940s. At this time when chauvinistic religious propaganda was rampant, a member of the Hindu Maha Sabha made an attempt on Gandhi's life on January 30, 1948, which proved fatal.

Gandhi's assassination led to widespread indignation throughout India. The public started demanding that Hindu religious organisations be banned. In some places members of these organisations were murdered. The government banned the activities of Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sangh, and the Hindu Maha Sabha was obliged to declare that it would renounce political activity and now concentrate on work in the field of culture and education. These tragic

events of January 1948 that culminated in the death of the national leader, the "father of the Indian nation", dealt a serious blow at the aspirations of the Hindu communalist leaders.

After the consolidation of the new state's sovereignty, the next major task was to surmount the economic consequences of the partition of the country into two separate dominions.

### **The Economic Consequences of Partition**

The post-war economic difficulties exacerbated by poor harvests, the curtailment of wartime production, shortages in certain types of raw materials and industrial articles were made still more serious by the partition of the country into two dominions.

Pakistan was accorded agricultural areas that had provided 40 per cent of the nation's cotton, 85 per cent of its jute and 40 per cent of its wheat. India immediately suffered from a shortage of raw materials for its main branch of industry—textiles—and found itself short of food supplies.

The armed conflict of 1947-1948, which was followed by a trade war between India and Pakistan in 1949-1950, dealt a major blow at the inter-regional economic ties which had taken shape back in the colonial period. India was now faced with the task of setting up its own cotton and jute base, while Pakistan had to create its own textile industry. Normalisation of trade relations between India and Pakistan were also complicated by the failure so far to resolve other economic problems, including the regularisation of refugees' property rights, financial claims across the borders, the division of currency reserves.

The common irrigation system and transport network were also now disrupted. For a long period the only contact with Assam was by air.

Now that supplies for the textile industry had been curtailed and that its markets had been reduced textile factories either had to close down or shorten the working week. Small-scale productions, spinners and handloom weavers suffered most from this shortage of raw materials and the abruptly curtailed market.

By the autumn of 1949 the volume of production in the main branches of industry amounted to a mere 60 or 70 per cent of the level attained during World War II. This depression in industrial production was determined not merely by the reduced markets for raw materials and finished articles but was also by the worn out condition of the capital equipment. A similar situation arose in the transport network, for 60 per cent of the locomotives and carriages needed replacement.

The fall in production inevitably gave rise to acute employment problems. In some districts unemployment among factory workers and in cottage industries reached menacingly high levels. In



Eastern Punjab, for instance, the number of industrial workers in 1946/47 and 1947/48 fell by a third. The situation in the labour market was further complicated by the influx of refugees, whose numbers exceeded the seven million mark.

The shortage of industrial consumer goods coincided with food shortages: in the first years after Independence agricultural production was only 90 per cent of pre-war output.

The partition of the country added to the contradictions intrinsic to Indian economic development right across the spectrum, contradictions stemming from the colonial structure of the economy. In the early years after Independence India still remained a backward agrarian country, in whose economic structure pre-capitalist patterns were predominant. Figures relating to the national income for 1948/49 show that 48.1 per cent was derived from agriculture, 11.5 per cent from cottage and crafts industries, and 8.3 per cent from large-scale industrial production. The predominance of feudal patterns in the system of landownership and land utilisation, the mediaeval level of technical equipment in agriculture meant that the level of labour productivity in India was one of the lowest in the world. The level of per capita national income in India was also one of the lowest in the world at that time: it amounted to 246 rupees in 1948. This was 10 per cent of the figure for Britain and five per cent of the American figure.

Scope on the economic front for manoeuvre on the part of the Indian bourgeoisie was extremely limited due to the dominant position enjoyed by foreign, for the most part British, capital in the main branches of the economy. According to the first survey of foreign investment in India drawn up on the basis of figures for June 1948, it was established that these investments totalled 3,200 million rupees, and of this total 72 per cent was British. Ninety-seven per cent of all investment in the oil extractive and refining industries was in foreign hands, 93 per cent in the rubber industry, 90 per cent in narrow-gauge railways, and match production, 89 per cent in the jute industry, 86 per cent in the tea plantations, 73 per cent in mining, etc.

Foreign monopolies reaped an average annual profit of between 1,200 and 1,500 million dollars from the capital invested.

The colonial structure of the Indian economy and the domination of foreign capital also predetermined India's place within the system of the international division of labour. As before India now performed the function of a raw material appendage to the industrial capitalist countries, Britain in particular: in 1946/47 60 per cent of India's total imports were foodstuffs and manufactured goods, while 52 per cent of her exports were raw materials and food.

The young Indian state now had the daunting task of overcoming its centuries-old backwardness and creating a diversified modern economy.

## Economic Policy. The "Mixed Economy" Course

In the early years after Independence the government's efforts in the economic sphere were concentrated in the main on overcoming the difficulties stemming from partition.

Gradually the areas made over to jute and cotton were extended considerably (by 60-70 per cent and 20-25 per cent respectively). New irrigation schemes were launched. A state tractor organisation was set up in conjunction with plans to develop virgin lands in 1947.

However, the concurrent campaign to increase food production met with far less success. Food shortages remained at a steady level and between 1947 and 1950 India imported over ten million tons of grain.

Despite the various measures adopted, per capita consumption of the main foodstuffs continued to fall. In 1948 rationing of essential foodstuffs was introduced in the towns. Rampant speculation in foodstuffs and essential goods had dealt a heavy blow at the family budgets of workers, artisans, the lower and middle strata of white-collar workers and the lower echelons of the entrepreneurial class. At the same time enormous fortunes had been created through speculative transactions—the process of primary accumulation had intensified.

A certain stabilisation in the economic situation by 1949 encouraged the propertied classes to transfer the money they accumulated to industrial enterprises.

Despite the continuing reduced scale of textile production, growth made itself felt by this period in the output of certain spheres of heavy industry (the cement, chemical and steel industries) which could be accounted for by the new lease of life now apparent in civil and industrial construction.

Supplies of new rolling-stock for the railways also began, and likewise of machine tools for the factories thanks to considerable increases in imports of capital equipment.

Imports of machinery in the early years after Independence were paid for in the main out of the sterling reserves India had built up during the war years and which by 1947 amounted to a total of 15,000 million rupees. According to the terms of an Anglo-Indian financial agreement signed in July 1948, 5,000 million rupees were used to pay for military equipment, to provide pensions for British officials, etc., while the remaining 10,000 million were used to secure for British industry a market for capital equipment used to modernise and expand India's industrial capacity.

This agreement between the two countries served for a time to entrench the influence British monopolies were able to exert over the course of the country's industrial development: however it did not prevent penetration of India by rival monopolies (from the USA, Japan and the FRG), nor did it prevent the Indian bourgeoisie from consolidating its position.



The Indian bourgeoisie, that was financially weak and poorly off for technical equipment and expertise, set up new branches of industry usually on the basis of agreements with foreign capitalists for the setting up of mixed companies. During the first three years of independence 88 mixed companies were set up, in car and tractor assembly, bicycle production and various other spheres of production.

The government encouraged private enterprise by introducing protective customs tariffs and placing certain restrictions on the activities of private foreign capital. The state Industrial Finance Corporation with assets of a hundred million rupees was set up in 1948 to finance industrial construction.

The principles of the Indian Union's economic policy were expounded in particular detail in the Resolution on Industrial Policy read out by Jawaharlal Nehru before the Constituent Assembly in April 1948. This vital document laid down the course of development for the so-called mixed economy, which reserved for the state a monopoly over specific spheres of industrial enterprise. The production of arms and atomic energy and the railways were made the monopoly of the state. In certain spheres of heavy industry, including ferrous metallurgy, the coal and oil industries, aircraft production, and some types of mechanical engineering the state reserved for itself the exclusive right to set up new enterprises. A further seventeen important branches of heavy and light industry were also made subject to state planning and control.

The new course towards state capitalism made itself felt when on July 1, 1948, the Reserve Bank of India was nationalised, and when in 1949 the Banking Companies Act was passed which enhanced state control over the activities of private joint-stock banks.

The state sector built up on the basis of property formerly owned by the colonial government (mainly armaments factories, the railways and power stations) accounted for a mere six per cent of total industrial production in 1948.

However limited these early attempts on the part of Nehru's Government to introduce state capitalism might seem, it must be remembered that his economic policy differed radically from that of the colonial regime.

### **The Foreign Policy of the Dominion's Government**

Principles of national sovereignty came still more clearly to the fore in the foreign policy of the dominion's government. As early as September 7, 1946 the interim government of colonial India had announced India's support for the neutrality principle and her refusal to join any military blocs. The principles of peace and positive neutrality were amplified and given full scope for development after Independence. India was in a good position to engage in active foreign

policy since it did not experience a stage of diplomatic isolation: by the beginning of 1950 India had established diplomatic relations with thirty-nine states.

At a session of the ruling party, the National Congress, in Jaipur (1948) the principles of India's foreign policy were defined in a special resolution: these were anti-colonialism, peace and neutrality, non-alignment.

India's representatives to the United Nations called for mandated territories to be placed under UN trusteeship. The anti-colonial aspect of India's foreign policy came particularly strikingly to the fore in the struggle which India's representatives waged within various UN committees to combat racial discrimination in South Africa.

The first attempt by India to establish widespread contacts with Asian countries was the convening of an Asian Relations Conference in Delhi in 1947, which was attended by representatives of 32 countries. However the lack of common political objectives meant that the scope for positive results was severely limited.

The Nehru Government established friendly relations with the USSR and other socialist countries and was one of the first governments to recognise the People's Republic of China.

Yet at the same time certain vacillations and inconsistencies came to the fore in India's foreign policy at this period, a fact which can be explained by the situation within the country itself and in particular by pressure from Britain, who still exerted considerable political and economic influence within the country. An example of such inconsistency is the fact that India, while supporting the Ho Chi Minh Government, at the same time virtually backed British policy in Malaya. At the international conference held in Delhi in 1949, to discuss the Indonesian question, India did no more than express its support for the resolutions passed in the UN which virtually granted no help to the national forces in the struggle against colonialism.

At this period India attempted to turn to the United States for support hoping for American financial and technical assistance in its industrialisation drive. Nehru hoped to extend American-Indian ties and by so doing to weaken the pressure Britain was bringing to bear on India. It was to this end that he paid a visit to the United States between October 11 and November 7, 1949. Although the attempt at political rapprochement was not successful, American policy in India did in fact pave the way towards the establishment in subsequent years of broad-based economic co-operation between the two countries, and served to encourage the flow of American capital into India.

The sphere of India's foreign relations that was fraught with the most tension was that connected with Pakistan in view of the Kashmir issue. The referral of the Kashmir issue to the United Nations enabled the British-American bloc to create, with the aid of the UN Commission on Kashmir and then of the UN mediator, an



instrument of interference in the internal affairs of both the dominions. India's firm stand over this issue, reflected in her repeated rejection of UN proposals to organise a plebiscite in Kashmir, averted the possible transformation of Kashmir into a NATO bridgehead in that key region of the world where the borders of the USSR, China, India, Pakistan and Afghanistan meet.

#### INTENSIFIED CLASS STRUGGLE

The attainment by India of political independence was an important prerequisite for the country's economic and social advance. However, in the early years after Independence it was only the propertied classes of Indian society who were in a position to make use of the fruits of that progress. The living conditions of the broad mass of the Indian people had deteriorated in the years 1947-1949, which fact served to fan social tension in the country and intensify class struggle.

#### **The Second Congress of the CPI. The Left Deviation in the Communist Movement**

Resolutions adopted by the Second Congress of the Communist Party of India held in Bombay in late February and early March 1948 made a strong impact on the organised workers' and peasants' movements in 1948 and 1949. Eighty-nine thousand members were represented at the Congress and these figures pointed to a significant increase in the party's strength. The report by the General Secretary of the CPI Central Committee, P.C. Joshi was subjected to sharp criticism. The leadership of the CPI, Joshi included, was accused of Right-wing opportunism, of nationalistic deviations.

The main task of the revolutionary forces, as was pointed out at the Congress, was to set up a democratic front, whose programme would include the implementation of far-reaching social changes including the elimination of landed estates without compensation, the nationalisation of British industrial enterprises, the main branches of industry and the banks; the introduction of a minimum working wage and an eight-hour working day; the establishment of workers' control in the factories; the abolition of the princely states and their administrative restructuring on national lines; the declaration of the right of all peoples in India to self-determination, the prohibition of caste and other forms of discrimination, etc. The Congress condemned the partition of India as an imperialist manoeuvre and demanded a complete break with the British empire.

Despite this declaration of tactics for the democratic front, however, the majority of the delegates supported the Left-sectarian position with regard to national forces. Nehru's Government was criticised for allegedly having deserted to the camp of the imperialists. The new leadership elected at the Congress and headed by B.T. Ranadive virtually adopted a course calling for the overthrow of the Congress government by means of an armed uprising.

The Left-sectarian deviation in the work of the CPI leaders undermined the position of the communist movement in the country as a whole. In a number of areas it suffered at the grass-root level and certain groups of the politically conscious strata of the population ceased to support it.

Right-wing forces in the country unleashed a witch-hunt of the Communists. For all intents and purposes the Communist Party and the mass organisations under its leadership were obliged to go underground. In some states (Madras, West Bengal, Travancore-Cochin) their activities were banned by law. Repression against the Communists and activists from the mass organisations began. Soon many members of the Politbureau, various leaders of the All-India Trade Union Congress and the Kisan Sabha found themselves in prison. The difficult conditions of underground struggle steeled the staunch nucleus of the party, but at the same time it hampered the development of the activities undertaken by the mass organisations.

#### **The Workers' and the Peasants' Movements**

The working class of India responded to these repressive measures taken against the Communist Party and the trade unions with rallies and protest strikes. However, by this stage an overall drop in the level of the strike movement was to be observed: in 1948 1,050,000 workers had taken part in strikes and 7,800,000 man-days had been lost, while in 1949 the respective figures were 685,000 workers and 6,700,000 lost man-days. This decline in the economic struggle of the working class could be attributed not only to that class' weariness, the cruel repressive measures introduced by the authorities, the position within the communist movement, but also to the split within the trade-union movement itself.

In May 1947 under the aegis of the National Congress an Indian National Trade Union Congress was set up, whose leadership came out in active support of the Congress Working Committee in January 1948 when it appealed to the workers for the establishment of Industrial Truce. In 1948 two other trade-union centres were set up: the Hind Mazdoor Sabha (Union of Indian Workers) and the United Trades Union Congress which were under the influence of various groups of socialists. The latter trade-union centre brought together for the main part trade unions in West Bengal.



Even after the three new trade-union organisations had been set up the All-India Trade Union Congress remained nevertheless the largest organisation of the Indian working people, as was confirmed at its session held in Bombay in 1949. The largest strikes at that period were the strikes lasting many months at the textile mills of Coimbatore (Madras province) and the action taken by white-collar workers in Calcutta, Bombay and other industrial centres. Despite the difficult conditions, some strikes ended in victory: working days were cut down at enterprises working the whole year round, at some enterprises wages were increased and dearness allowance was paid to cover rising prices.

The most important result of the struggle by the working class was the adoption in 1948-1949 of a number of laws that provided the core of labour legislation in post-Independence India: the Industrial Disputes Act (1947), the Indian Trade Unions Act (1947), the Factories Act (1948), the Employees' State Insurance Act (1948), the Minimum Wages Act (1948), etc.

Trade-union organisations embarked on action aimed at securing the implementation of the officially adopted labour legislation.

Apart from the struggle waged by the working class in 1947-1949 mass action by various strata of the Indian peasantry began breaking out in certain parts of the country. The most concentrated activities of this sort were those engaged in by various groups from the lowest strata of the tenant-farmers, who were demanding cuts in land-rent, substitution of payments in money for rent in kind and more secure rights of hereditary tenure. It was with similar objectives that the share-croppers of West Bengal, Bihar, Bombay, the Punjab and other provinces took up the struggle. An important factor leading the tenant-farmers to take action was the frequent eviction of tenant-farmers from the lands belonging to the big landlords and the rich peasants.

Wider groups of peasants, including the more prosperous of the tenant-farmers, began to take part in mass campaigns to press for the democratisation and rapid implementation of the bills drafted to abolish the *zamindari* system, that had been put forward by the states' governments for discussion by the legislatures. In some districts of the United Provinces (e.g. the Ballia district), Pepsu and in the south of the country peasants began to occupy land belonging to the *zamindars*.

This type of peasant action assumed a particularly wide scale in Telengana, where the peasant uprising which had begun in 1946 was still going on. In the parts of the province where the uprising was successful village councils or *panchayats* were set up by the peasants, which then proceeded to implement agrarian reforms, put a ceiling on big landlords' holdings and redistribute the land thus alienated among the peasants with small plots. By the end of 1948 over 1,200,000 acres of land had been redistributed in this way.

In 1949 units of the regular Indian army, sent to Telengana to put

down the uprising, entered Hyderabad. After that the uprising developed into a guerilla war, which lasted until 1951. However, during this, the second stage of the campaign, a split within the insurgents' camp took place. The more prosperous peasants whose demands had been satisfied by the agrarian reforms implemented in 1949-1950 left the movement as they were alarmed at the increasing influence of the poor peasants in the *panchayats*, now that the latter had assumed leadership of the movement.

This struggle of the peasantry forced the government drawn from the bourgeois-landlord classes to take more rapid steps towards the elaboration and implementation of agrarian reforms, a move which was indeed taken after the declaration of India as a sovereign republic in January 1950.

### The Drafting and Adoption of a New Constitution

Prior to this historic act a good deal of work had been devoted to the preparation of a new constitution, that sealed the transfer of power into the hands of the national bourgeoisie. Sharp disagreements on two issues came to the surface in the course of work on the constitution for independent India: the nature of constitutional relationship between India and Britain and the national question.

The position enjoyed by British capital in the Indian economy, the dependence of Indian-run production on the British market meant that the Indian bourgeoisie was most anxious to keep India within the British Commonwealth (as the British empire had come to be known after the Second World War). At the same time the political leaders of India were most concerned to find a way of keeping India within the Commonwealth on terms that would not be detrimental to her own sovereignty.

These questions were discussed at the Conference of Commonwealth Prime Ministers held in London in October 1948. It was decided that the new dominions—India, Pakistan and Ceylon—should remain members of the British Commonwealth and at the same time retain their political independence of the British Crown.

At the next conference of the National Congress in Jaipur (December 1948) the government, despite the demands from a group of delegates insisting on a clean political break with Britain, was given a mandate to proceed with negotiations on the basis of the decisions taken at the London Commonwealth Conference of 1948. At the next Commonwealth Conference in London (April 1949) a formula was worked out, according to which India as a sovereign republic acknowledged the British Crown as the symbol of the British Commonwealth of Nations. In May 1949 the All-India Congress Committee and Constituent Assembly approved this



decision. (It is revealing to note that in the actual text of the constitution there is no mention of India's relationship to the British Commonwealth).

At the Congress meeting in Jaipur equally heated discussion centred round the issue as to whether or not states should be set up on the basis of language (i.e., ethnic origins) as had been proposed as far back as 1928 in the "Nehru Constitution". By this time, under pressure from those advocating the creation of linguistic states Andhra, Karnataka, Kerala and Maharashtra, the Committee of the Constituent Assembly responsible for the drafting of the constitution appointed a special committee to look into the question of linguistic provinces (the so-called Dhar Commission). In its report submitted at the end of 1948 the Commission not only voiced its opposition to the creation of states based on language, but came out against any changes whatsoever in the administrative and territorial divisions that had already taken shape in India over the years.

The Jaipur meeting of the Congress appointed a committee (consisting of Nehru, Vallabhai Patel and Pattabhi Sitaramayya) that came to be known as the JVP Committee on account of the initials of its three members' first names, that was to look into the report from the Dhar Commission and put forward final recommendations. This committee also rejected the principle of linguistic states with reference to the fact that the consolidation of language communities after the recent partition of the country would give rise to new separatist trends in internal policy. In its report the Committee stressed how undesirable it would be to alter India's administrative and territorial divisions, since changes in the borders of the former princely states could well undermine India's unity as a state.

The first round of this campaign to set up the linguistic states thus ended in failure. However, the movement to secure the creation of such states (Karnataka, Kerala, Andhra, Maharashtra and Mahagujarat, i.e., Great Gujarat) continued to grow.

The Constitution of India that was adopted by the Constituent Assembly on November 26, 1949, is permeated by the endeavour to consolidate Indian statehood and to centralise the new power.

India was declared a sovereign republic headed by a President, who enjoyed considerable powers: he was the supreme commander of the country's armed forces, it was he who appointed the Prime Minister and ministers of the Central Government on the latter's recommendation, as also state governors who were the local representatives of central executive power; it was also his function during recesses of Parliament to promulgate Ordinances, and also to declare a state of emergency when required. He gave assent to bills passed by the Central Parliament and the state legislatures. The President also had the right to refer an act to the legislatures for further analysis or amendment.

The supreme legislative body was the Central Parliament con-

sisting of two chambers: the House of the People (Lok Sabha) and the Council of States (Rajya Sabha). The state legislatures were legislative assemblies which like the Lok Sabha were re-elected after every five years: the franchise for these elections was universal, voting direct and the ballot secret. The right to vote was enjoyed by all citizens of India over 21, while the right to be elected was enjoyed by citizens over 25 (to the Rajya Sabha—over 30).

The members of the Rajya Sabha were elected by electoral colleges from among the members of the state legislatures (twelve Rajya Sabha members were appointed by the President for their merits in the fields of culture, science and public activity).

The President was elected by a special electoral college formed from among the Members of the Parliament and the state legislatures.

The principle of strict demarcation of legislative, executive and judicial powers is laid down in the Constitution. The Government of India and the state governments (headed by the Chief Ministers) are responsible to the Central Parliament and the state legislatures.

The Supreme Court of India and the High Courts in the states were entitled to interpret laws, and to suspend them as "constitutionally invalid".

The Constitution also laid down clearly defined distinctions between the economic and political functions of the central and state governments, and so the whole administrative system combined the high degree of centralisation found in a unitary state with elements of federalism.

The Constitution thus consolidated the main achievements of a general democratic nature after the victory of the national revolution: bourgeois-democratic civic freedoms, a ban on all forms of discrimination whether on ethnic, caste or religious grounds.

Sanctity of private property was laid down in Article 31 of the Constitution which also circumscribed the right to confiscate property in the public interest and provided for the payment of compensation in such cases.

The new Constitution reflected the fact that a bourgeois democracy had now been set up in India and it laid down the legal principles for the development of national capitalism.

The ratification of the new Constitution by the Constituent Assembly marked the formalisation of a great turning point in the historic destinies of the country. Rajendra Prasad, one of the oldest Congress leaders and an associate of Gandhi, was elected unanimously as the first President of India by the members of the Constituent Assembly, and Jawaharlal Nehru was nominated first Prime Minister of the Republic of India.

The Constitution came into force on January 26, 1950, on the anniversary of Independence Day and ever since the national holiday known as the Republic Day has been celebrated on this date.



## **THE REPUBLIC OF INDIA: BUILDING THE FOUNDATIONS OF INDEPENDENCE (1950-1964)**

### **INTERNAL POLITICAL SITUATION OF THE EARLY 1950s**

In the first year of its independent development the Republic of India met with serious economic and political difficulties. The serious consequences of partition had not yet been overcome and industry had not yet emerged from the post-war depression, when poor harvests in several regions made existing food shortages far graver than before. The threat of mass-scale famine now hung over the country.

The Indian Government turned to the United States with a request for help in tiding over the food situation. Long negotiations began over conditions for loans, in the course of which American imperialists tried to bring their influence to bear on Indian policies. It was only shipments of food from the USSR and the Chinese People's Republic that at last accelerated the negotiations between India and the USA, which in June 1951 culminated in the provision of the first large loan (190 million dollars) for the purchase of wheat from the United States.

These food shortages, particularly in the southern states fanned social tension in the country. Although steps had already been taken to suppress the activities of the workers' and peasants' mass-scale organisations, and although the trade-union movement was now divided, the intensity of class struggle in town and country remained at the same level as before.

### **Conflict Within the Congress. The Formation of New Left Opposition Parties**

The continuing activities of the mass movement, the complex internal-political situation on the one hand, and outside pressures from the US and British bourgeoisie on the other, left their mark on the situation within the Indian National Congress.

After attaining political independence India now had to cope with the monumental task of implementing far-reaching economic, socio-political and cultural changes so as to reorganise the country's feudal and colonial economic and social structure, to put an end to economic and cultural backwardness and create a

modern diversified economy as the foundation of its independent development.

The solution of these problems was approached in two ways by the leaders of the National Congress. One line of approach was to opt for unrestricted development of private enterprise right through the economy, to reach a compromise with the class of feudal rulers and landlords, to suppress the struggle of the working people and look to the Western countries for a lead in matters of foreign policy: this line was adopted by the Right-wing led by Vallabhai Patel, the deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Home Affairs. The other approach was to press above all for the development of the state sector, the introduction of the planning principle in the system of state control over the development of the nation's economy, the gradual implementation of anti-feudal agrarian and other reforms, and to carry out measures designed to raise the living standards of the working people, pursuing in the meantime a neutralist, essentially anti-colonial course in foreign affairs: it was this approach that manifested itself in the fundamental principles behind the policies introduced by Jawaharlal Nehru. This line of action was actively supported by the Centrist and Left groupings within the leadership of the ruling party and in the central legislative and executive bodies.

The struggle between the advocates of these two paths of development for India shaped the situation within the National Congress. Despite opposition from conservative forces, Nehru was nevertheless able in the early post-war years to pursue in the main the political course he had charted out. However the political weight and influence enjoyed by Patel who had now become the second most important figure in the ruling party and the state, were growing from day to day, a trend which, incidentally, he was well placed to foster, thanks to his personal role in the consolidation of the administrative apparatus, in the preservation of the country's unity and the strengthening of the young nation's statehood. Patel was the idol of the bourgeoisie and landowning classes, who saw him as the "strong man" in the Indian Government. Although in accordance with the new Constitution, in force since January 1950, there had been a certain democratisation of public life, as early as the end of February the same year the Parliament (the reorganised Constituent Assembly), egged on by Patel, passed a Preventive Detention Act. This law gave the police the right to arrest and imprison for a term of up to one year without trial or inquest persons detained for political reasons.

The growing influence enjoyed by Patel and his group became evident after his supporter P.D. Tandon was elected President of the Congress at the AICC session held in Nasik (Maharashtra) in the autumn of 1950. The situation both among the leaders and within the local organisations of the ruling party was growing more and more tense. As a result a number of Left groups, which



later formed the Peasants' and Workers' Party (enjoying mass-scale support in the state of West Bengal) and the People's Congress (that enjoyed popular support, in particular, in the state of Uttar Pradesh) left the Congress Party. The Left opposition within the Congress rallied together in the Democratic Front. In June 1951 a new nation-wide party of the petty bourgeoisie Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party (Peasants' and Workers' People's Party) held its inaugural congress in Patna. It was formed from the Democratic Front (that had in the meantime left the Congress), led by Acharya Kripalani and R.A. Kidwai, in conjunction with certain organisations affiliated to the Peasants' and Workers' Party and to the People's Congress.

This desertion of the National Congress by certain Left groupings on the one hand, and the death of Patel in December 1950 on the other weakened both the extreme Right and Left wings in the party's leadership. At the same time these developments undoubtedly served to strengthen the position of the Centrists headed by Jawaharlal Nehru. However, the influence of the Right wing in the party's central bodies, who were now grouped round the President of the National Congress, P.D. Tandon, remained considerable despite all. It was not until September 1951 that the Congress Working Committee elected Nehru to become the party's President in view of the fact that the first general elections to the country's legislative bodies were imminent and Nehru's tremendous popularity throughout the nation was not to be taken lightly in view of that event.

While this polarisation of the forces within the National Congress had been taking place and new political organisations of the petty bourgeoisie were springing up, further splits in the camp of the Left opposition were also coming to the surface. In April 1951 a group of Left Socialists led by Aruna Asaf Ali broke away from the Socialist Party which strongly condemned Jayaprakash Narayan and other party leaders and called for collaboration with the Communists. The conditions now taking shape in the country were more favourable for collaboration of the Communists and petty-bourgeois revolutionary democrats. Changes that had recently taken place within the Indian communist movement itself had also contributed to this changed situation.

#### **The End of the Left Deviation in the Communist Party. The Mass Movement in the Early 1950s**

The Left-sectarian deviation and also repression at the hands of the official organs of power dealt major blows at the communist movement and undermined the Communists' links with the masses. By the beginning of 1951 membership of the Communist Party had fallen by over two thirds and totalled a mere twenty-five

thousand. However, undeterred, sound elements within the Party struggled hard to put a stop to the Left-sectarian deviation. As early as May 1950 a plenary session of the CPI's Central Committee was held, and a new, provisional Central Committee was elected. The new Politbureau of the Central Committee drew up and published in April 1951 a draft party programme calling for the creation of a broad anti-feudal and anti-imperialist front, embracing the national bourgeoisie, but led by the working class and its party. This draft programme channelled the party's activities towards the implementation of anti-feudal, anti-imperialist reforms. In May 1951 a plenary session of the CPI's Central Committee approved the programme and the "Statement of Policy". Both documents heralded a decisive turning point in the policy of the Indian Communists. At the party's All-India Conference in October of that year the programme was adopted with a few minor amendments. A new Central Committee and Politbureau led by General Secretary, Ajoy Ghosh, whose name is linked with the defeat of the Left deviation in the Party, were elected.

Positive changes in the basic points of the Party programme and the tactics followed by Indian Communists made possible further advances of the mass movement in the country. The work of the Communists and the democrats co-operating with them in the mass organisations of the working people was made somewhat easier by the Nehru government's move towards a greater degree of democratisation of public life in internal politics in the middle of 1950. In the summer of 1950 releases of Communists from prison began and in the autumn of that year the Party's activities were made legal together with those of certain mass organisations in the state of Madras, and from January of the following year the ban on communist activities was lifted in West Bengal as well.

The activity of those peasant unions led by the Communists also intensified at this period, particularly after the work of the All-India Kisan Sabha had been made legal in August 1951. Within a short period its membership exceeded 800,000 again.

Apart from the local branches of the All-India Kisan Sabha that was led by Communists, other peasant organisations were also active in the villages in the late 1940s and the early 1950s. In six states Kisan Sabha organisations were set up under the leadership of Socialists, but they acquired a mass following only in two states, namely Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. In March 1949 the provincial Kisan Sabhas came together in a nation-wide organisation—the Indian Peasant Council (Hind Kisan Panchayat). Soon after the Hind Kisan Panchayat merged with peasant organisations led by peasant democrats S.S. Saraswati, Y. Sharma and others to form the Samyukta Kisan Sabha (United Peasant Alliance). This alliance was influential mainly in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, certain districts of West Bengal and some other states.



In its work in the villages the National Congress relied on local party organisations, and also on the National Peasant Congress which had been set up as early as the war period by N. G. Ranga (in 1950 it was renamed the Indian Peasant Conference). It appealed to the prosperous strata of the peasantry and was particularly influential in the south of the country. The Indian Peasant Conference supported the agrarian policy pursued by the National Congress.

The main thrust of the organised peasant movement was the struggle for the speedy implementation and radicalisation of the laws for abolishing the *zamindari* system then being discussed in the legislatures. In all states mass meetings and demonstrations were organised, petitions were drawn up and submitted to legislative and executive bodies, in which the demands of the peasants were set out. Mass gatherings of peasants often ended in clashes with the police.

Apart from their struggle for land the most important concern of both the organised and spontaneous peasant movements was the campaign to improve conditions of tenure. Anticipating the introduction of agrarian reforms the *zamindars* began mass evictions of tenant farmers with rights of permanent tenure, in order to extend the areas rented out to share-croppers (the so-called *sir* or *khudkasht*). (The agrarian reform bills provided for the retention of such land by the landlords.) Peasant resistance soon took the form of violent clashes with the landlords and for this reason the governments of several states (Uttar Pradesh and Madras for example) issued special ordinances forbidding the *zamindars* from evicting the tenant farmers from their land.

Under pressure from share-croppers, that section of the tenant farmers bereft of virtually all rights and subjected to the harshest exploitation, laws were passed in most states in the late 1940s and early 1950s which regulated landlord-tenant relations: they provided maximum rates of rent, introduced limitations on landlords' rights to evict the tenants, etc. However, this new legislation was not implemented properly because of resistance from the landlords, who collaborated closely with the local administration and revenue authorities, and also as a result of the weak political organisation and the low level of class consciousness among the mass of share-croppers. It was in this situation that the Kisan Sabha led by the Communists carried out mass propaganda campaigns and other work among the tenant farmers, so as to inform them about the new tenancy acts and rally them to the struggle aimed at placing limits on feudal exploitation.

In certain regions of the country (some districts in Uttar Pradesh, Madras, Orissa, the Punjab and elsewhere) an organised struggle of agricultural labourers began, rallied together by specially created unions, which demanded higher daily wages and improved working conditions. However, the struggle waged by the rural proletariat was of localised limited scope and only played an insignificant part in the overall activities of the agrarian movement.

Apart from the strikes for economic rights directed against capitalist rationalisation (longer working days, higher output norms, etc.) and calling for higher wages, trade-union agitation for observance of the 1948 labour laws by entrepreneurs began to play an important part in the activities of the labour movement in the early 1950s. More and more attention was being paid by the unions to relations with entrepreneurs and government bodies officially in charge of the implementation of the new labour laws. In 1950 the draft of a law was published which virtually placed the activities of the unions under government control; however, indignant protest by the organised working class prevented this law from ever going through.

The difficult food situation that had taken shape during the years 1951-1953 and the rising prices had an adverse effect on the development of the strike movement. When already subjected to severe material privations workers were hard put to it to sustain long strikes. This explains the substantial changes in the number of lost man-days from 13 million in 1950 to 3-4 million in 1951-1954.

The split within the trade-union movement and the Left sectarian deviation affecting the work of the trade unions led by Communists also undermined to some extent the struggle of the working class.

### The First General Elections of 1951-1952

Despite serious problems of both an objective and subjective nature the mass-scale action of workers, peasants and the urban petty bourgeoisie influenced the outcome of the first general election which emerged as an important landmark in the domestic politics of India after the proclamation of the Republic. The first general elections (to the Parliament and the state legislatures) in a country as enormous as India, which apart from everything else did not have available sufficient numbers of administrative personnel for the undertaking, and had had no experience of bourgeois parliamentarianism could not be conducted simultaneously throughout the country. They lasted from October 25, 1951 to February 24, 1952.

The election campaign which was conducted in 1951 served to galvanise the country's various political organisations and to spotlight the balance of socio-political forces in the country.

On the eve of the elections it was already clear that the National Congress far outstripped all other political organisations in its popular following among the masses of voters (the vast majority of which consisted of peasants or various petty-bourgeois strata of the urban population) who were now going to the polls for the first time. This fact could be attributed not merely to the historic role now attributed to the Congress, that had carried the national revolution forward to victory, and to its position as the ruling



party, but also to the distinctive character of the National Congress as a mass-scale political organisation. The National Congress which was still the largest and most influential party of the national bourgeoisie, to a large extent still constituted a nation-wide organisation supported by wide strata of the urban petty bourgeoisie and the peasantry. In its policy documents and tactical approach it was above all the interests of these classes that were taken into account. Various petty-bourgeois strata were also represented in the leadership of the Congress organisations. These special features of the organisational and political structure of the Congress, as a party, helped it to a large extent to retain its mass support.

The National Congress was in the centre of the spectrum of Indian politics as it were; various reactionary parties of a feudal or communalist types made up its Right wing. The most influential of these were the Ram Rajya Parishad (The Society of Believers in the State of the God Rama) set up by former princes, and the Hindu Maha Sabha, the oldest organisation representing the Hindu community and, to a lesser extent, the Jan Sangh (People's Union) that had come into being just before the elections and drew the bulk of its support from the Hindu commercial bourgeoisie and the chauvinistically inclined sections of the urban middle classes.

These and other organisations of the Right opposition supported for the most part the interests of the feudal rulers and landlords and the class of traders and money-lenders.

On the Left of the National Congress were the Communist Party of India which had now successfully regained its earlier influence, the revolutionary-democratic parties like the Forward Bloc, the Revolutionary Socialist Party, the Workers' and Peasants' Party of Maharashtra and many others. The revolutionary-democratic parties worked within the confines of several states and were not nation-wide organisations. Their ideology consisted of a distinctive blend of Marxist elements, petty-bourgeois socialism and Gandhism.

The petty-bourgeois Socialist Party and the Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party constituted something in the way of a "Left Centre". These parties whose ideology was strongly influenced by Western Social-Democracy were characterised by their anti-communism and hostility to the socialist countries.

Close on eighty political parties took part in the election campaign. The party-political structure of India could be characterised as follows: a large number of organisations enjoying limited influence within the confines of a single state or even a single region within a state; a complex interweaving of revolutionary-democratic and bourgeois-nationalist ideology and politics; blurred distinctions between bourgeois and petty-bourgeois interests; a significant role of religious, caste and regional interests behind the

emergence and activities of political organisations, which provided a reliable reflection of the social and class structure of Indian society in the course of transition to capitalism, in which petty-bourgeois strata and groups were predominant, but which also contained classes representing the now obsolescent feudal order. The political life of India had been affected by the specific character of the Indian bourgeoisie which was only just taking shape, the main groups in which consisted of small-scale entrepreneurs, often representing local, ethnic or regional interests, and also by the role of such traditional social institutions as caste and religion.

On the eve of the elections the Right-socialist leaders were reckoning that they would be able to put an end to the virtual political monopoly enjoyed by the National Congress, and would set up in the country a strong opposition that could voice claims to power. However, the actual results showed up these calculations for what they were worth. The elections revealed that the vast mass of voters supported the Congress, and the main opposition to the Congress from the Left came from the Communist Party acting in conjunction with certain revolutionary-democratic parties. The Communists succeeded in setting up a united front in certain states: West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Madras and Travancore-Cochin.

The Right-socialist parties and also the reactionary communalist parties suffered a crushing defeat.

In the parliamentary elections the National Congress gained 44.5 per cent of the votes and 74.3 per cent of the seats (under a majority system) and the Communist Party and its allies gained 6.7 per cent of the votes and close on 10 per cent of the seats. The Right Socialists secured 12.6 per cent of the votes but less than 5 per cent of the seats and the three parties of the Right: Hindu Maha Sabha, Ram Rajya Parishad and Jan Sangh gained 4.8 per cent of the votes and 10 seats (of a total 480).

In the elections to the legislative assemblies in the states the Congress secured 42 per cent of the total votes and 65.7 per cent of all seats (2,248 seats): the Communist Party and its allies in the united front gained 234 seats, while the Right Socialists won 204 seats and the three other parties 87 seats.

The Congress thus had the chance to form one-party governments at the centre and in the states. The bulk of the voters followed the party of Gandhi and Nehru believing that it would carry out the programme of social and economic change set out in its election manifesto. The elections showed that on the whole Indian public opinion was veering towards the Left. The Communist Party which had close on 30,000 members had won the votes of almost 6,000,000 people. It had secured a particularly strong foothold in West Bengal and the southern states—Madras, Hyderabad, Travancore-Cochin—where the mainstay of its support was provided by the mass peasant organisations.



The elections gave the ruling party a mandate for implementing a programme of economic and social reforms aimed at completely reorganising colonial and feudal structures.

## ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL POLICY

### Agrarian Reforms

The first important step taken in the sphere of economic policy aimed at transforming the economic system inherited from the colonial period along capitalist lines was the implementation of agrarian reforms in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

In its election manifesto of 1946 the National Congress had declared its intention to do away with "intermediaries" between the state and tillers of the land. However the system involving "intermediaries" was seen as meaning estates owned by *zamindars*, not the general feudal pattern of land ownership as such. The *zamindars*, who constituted the nucleus of the feudal landowning class and who had provided the main bastion of support for British rule in India, represented the most reactionary section of the landlord class. They maintained fewer links with the Indian national bourgeoisie than any other landowning group. For this reason the restrictions placed on their estates was the first step taken when agrarian legislation was introduced aimed at changing the previous system of landownership. Between 1947 and 1954 an agrarian reform bill was drawn up in each state (or rather a law for the abolition of the *zamindari* system), adopted by the state legislature and then ratified by the President of India. However, these acts of agrarian reform did not affect landownership in areas where the *rayatwari* system was in existence, i.e., 57 per cent of all the country's occupied land.

As regards the rest of the country, only part of the *zamindars'* land was alienated. According to the laws providing for the abolition of the *zamindari* system, *sir* and *khudkasht* lands remained their property. In addition, the *zamindars* were allowed to retain their residential premises, complete with home-farms, agricultural implements, cattle and other such property, which had been accumulated thanks to the semi-feudal exploitation to which they had subjected the peasants.

A crucial feature of these laws introduced to abolish the *zamindari* system was that compensation was paid to the landlords amounting to a total of some 7,000 million rupees. The source from which these compensation payments were drawn was the land-revenue paid to the state by the ex-tenant farmers now farming on the lands alienated from the former *zamindars'* estates. In most states the tenant farmers continued to pay the same land-rent as before, but now to the state direct. At the same time the overall total of the compensation payments which the *zamindars* received each year came to less than the incomes they had formerly derived from land rent. This meant that there now ensued a certain

redistribution of the money equivalent of the surplus product exacted from the peasant tenants between the various dominant classes in Indian society in the interests of the national bourgeoisie: the new funds coming into the state budget were used to accelerate the development of the country's capitalist economy. The bulk of the *zamindars'* lands were alienated: 87 per cent in Uttar Pradesh, 84 per cent in Bihar, etc., and the landlord class as a whole lost close on 60 per cent of the lands it had previously owned.

This meant that the bulk of the *zamindars* were economically far worse off than they had been prior to the implementation of the reforms. However, although their economic and, consequently, political position was weaker, they still remained part of the landowning class.

Meanwhile what effects did the agrarian reforms have on the position of the tenant farmers among the peasants? The occupancy tenants who held their lands directly from the *zamindars* or from under-tenure-holders, acquired a status similar to landowners in the *rayatwari* areas. In most states (Assam, West Bengal, Orissa, Bihar, Bhopal, Rajasthan, Ajmer, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra, Madras and others) these tenant farmers automatically acquired this status when the new land survey and settlement were introduced. In certain other states, however, (Uttar Pradesh, Bombay, Mysore, etc.) they acquired these rights in return for redemption payments, which in Uttar Pradesh, for example, came to ten times the land-revenue for their holdings, and in Saurashtra to six times the land-revenue.

In most states the position of tenant farmers who had been cultivating the land that had been alienated from the *zamindars* changed little after the agrarian reforms had been implemented. The bulk of these tenant farmers continued to pay the land-revenue that came to the same amount as the land-rent they had been paying previously. Even in those states where land-taxes were reduced below former rent levels their position changed little (with the exception of the tenant farmers in Saurashtra).

However, there is no doubt that all ex-tenant farmers benefited from the fact that after the agrarian reforms had been introduced none of the various feudal requisitions or *abwabs* were collected any more. Yet this advantage was virtually reduced to naught by the fact that rates of direct taxation of the rural population were raised, as indeed were rates of indirect taxation at this time.

The agrarian reforms were implemented against a background of fierce political struggle. The peasants were demanding a radical resolution of the agrarian question and as a minimum an immediate and complete implementation of the agrarian legislation already passed. At the same time, however, the reformers were having to counter all-out resistance on the part of landowning interests and their supporters in the state government and legislative bodies.

Despite the limited nature of the agrarian reforms, they undeniably possessed progressive significance of historic dimen-



sions, for they limited the scope available for the feudal and semi-feudal exploitation of the peasants. Yet the Zamindari Abolition Acts were not in themselves enough to encourage the landlords to a sufficient degree to move on to farm their lands on capitalist lines.

However the economic justification behind the partial retention of landed estates as the reforms were implemented was, in the minds of their architects, the hope that large capitalist farms on the basis of the land remaining in the hands of the former powerful landlords would be set up.

To this end while the *zamindari* system was being abolished, so other measures were being introduced to accelerate the reorientation of all semi-feudal landowners (not only *zamindars*) towards farming along capitalist lines. One such step was the drafting of laws to lay down the maximum size of the private land-holding. However during the first six years after Independence this question remained shelved, as it were, while the *zamindari* estates were being abolished. In 1953 the question of the maximum ("ceiling") size of land-holding was again brought up for consideration. The stipulation of the maximum size of land-holding was one of the vital tasks of agrarian policy during the first and also second five-year plan periods of India's independent economic development.

The question as to this "ceiling" for land-holdings gave rise to serious differences among various sections of the national bourgeoisie and in the ruling party. In the first place, this question of the "ceiling" affected the whole of the landowning class, not merely the *zamindars*; secondly, this question affected not only the feudal and semi-feudal landowners, but all large landowners whatsoever, including those who ran their estates on capitalist lines; thirdly, the more prosperous peasants who owned the land in the majority of the villages feared lest their interests too might be affected.

By the middle of the 1960s laws concerning this "ceiling" had been passed in the majority of the states, while in the remainder they had still to pass through the various readings in the legislatures. At a time when over 60 per cent of land-holdings in the country were under five acres, "ceilings" were being laid down in the various states which exceeded this level many times over (for example, 40 times over in the dry-farming lands of Mysore, and 60 times over in the state of Andhra Pradesh).

Furthermore, in many states families numbering more than five people were permitted to retain land in excess of the stipulated "ceiling". Paragraphs were also incorporated into the laws which laid down that these new rulings did not extend to "effective farms", "co-operative farms" and certain other categories of holdings.

It emerged that even when the new legislation was implemented in its entirety the bulk of land-holdings—those of small and

medium size—were not affected. The newly established "ceilings" which averaged 15-30 acres for wet land and 80-100 acres for dry-farming land exceeded by far the size of the bulk (60-70 per cent) of peasant holdings: these averaged five acres of wet land and ten acres of dry-farming land. As experience was to show, after the "ceiling" acts had been applied in Hyderabad and Bengal hardly any surpluses were revealed. The landlords succeeded with little difficulty in circumventing the new laws making full use of the numerous loopholes in them. Although the big landlords owned over a hundred million acres, by 1967 only 2,300,000 acres had been declared in excess of the stipulated norms.

The "surpluses" were taken over from the landlords after paying them compensation. The extent of these payments, which like those after the abolition of the *zamindari* system were made over a period of time, in money or special bonds to be paid off by the treasury, amounted to considerably more than the payments made to the *zamindars*.

The "ceiling" legislation was a coercive extra-economic measure with the help of which the national bourgeoisie tried to step up the transfer of Indian agriculture to the path of capitalist development.

These measures did, however, dissuade the peasants from engaging in any active class struggle. Therefore in the period when the Indian agriculture was embarking on the path of capitalist development and the peasant movement was going through a temporary decline, the resolution of the "ceiling" issue was postponed once again.

### The Bhoodan and Gramdan Movement

The struggle to achieve redistribution of land led to the emergence of the so-called *bhoodan* movement (literally "donation of land").

The essential feature of this movement was the voluntary relinquishing of land which was subsequently redistributed among peasants who owned very little or no land at all. The man behind this movement was the prominent follower of Gandhi, Acharya Vinoba Bhave. The *bhoodan* movement was launched to counter the violent seizure and redistribution of landlords' property by the insurgent peasants of Telengana. The first public exhortation to this end was made by Bhave in that region on April 15, 1951.

The movement achieved a relative degree of success at the time when the reforms to abolish the *zamindari* system were being prepared and implemented. By 1955 the bulk of the land voluntarily relinquished by landlords—over 4,300,000 acres—was in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. When the implementation of the land reform in the *zamindari* areas led to a temporary decline in the



peasants' militancy, this new movement gradually dwindled away. Furthermore, much of the land made over voluntarily by the landlords proved unfit for cultivation.

At the end of 1955 the movement began to enter its last phase, the *gramdan* phase (the giving away of whole villages). At this stage of the movement all land in a village would be declared "God's" or "no man's" land belonging to the village as a community. However this did not mean that any major changes took place in actual class relations within such villages. This movement was less successful than the *bhoodan* movement.

The National Congress and the government gave the *bhoodan* and the *gramdan* movements their full support. In the larger states legislation was introduced placing the collection and redistribution of such lands under the control of the administrative apparatus, and allocating funds from the state budget to the support of this movement.

The All-India Kisan Sabha and the CPI adopted from the outset a favourable view of this movement, albeit a critical one. While explaining to the peasants that the *bhoodan* movement could not solve the agrarian question in India, the local functionaries of the Kisan Sabha did, nevertheless, support the redistribution of this land, demanding, however, that land secured in this way be in practice redistributed among landless and land-hungry peasants and agricultural labourers. The transformations carried out in the sphere of land relations led to a situation by which feudal practices no more dominated in Indian agriculture. Small-scale tenancy ceased to be the main form of the peasants' land-use: in 1961 tenants' holdings accounted for 7.7 per cent of the total number of holdings and 4.22 per cent of the total operated area; while the holdings of semi-tenants accounted for 15.46 per cent of the total number of holdings and 18 or 19 per cent of the total operated area. The formation of small-scale commodity and capitalist sectors in agriculture has been accelerated, and all these factors gave rise to conditions that favoured the introduction of a policy of capitalist industrialisation.

### Accelerated Development of State Capitalism

In the first major policy documents relating to the economic sphere (Industrial Policy Resolution of 1948, the Resolution on Economic Policy drawn up at the Nasik meeting of the National Congress in 1950 and others), and also in the Constitution, emphasis was placed on the decisive role of the state in the building up of the national economy. In 1950 the government set up its Planning Commission that was headed by Jawaharlal Nehru. The Commission prepared a draft for the first five-year plan covering the period from April 1, 1951 to March 31, 1956, i.e., the period

from the 1951/52 to the 1955/56 financial year. As in the first, so in subsequent five-year economic development plans efforts were centred on developing the state sector both with regard to industry and the infra-structure, targets were drawn up for the main branches of industrial and agricultural production; the volume and main channels of investment for both the state and the private sectors and the sources and volume of savings in the state sector were also laid down in advance.

While the first five-year plan was directed to a large extent towards the implementation of measures paving the way to the restructuring of industry, the second (1956/57-1960/61) and third (1961/62-1965/66) five-year plans contained detailed programmes for the industrialisation of the country. The five-year plans for economic development are the most concentrated expression of the policy of state capitalism in India.

The implementation of this policy and the creation of the state sector provided an important means of accelerating the country's economic development. However, the creation of the state sector did not change the socio-economic character of Indian society, on the contrary, it stimulated the expansion of private capitalist enterprise. During the first ten years of planned economic development (1950/51-1960/61) the paid-up capital of private joint-stock companies grew by 57.4 per cent. In 1960/61 the share of state-owned enterprises in the annual output of large-scale industry and mining came to only 10 per cent.

Nevertheless, the creation and growth of the state sector introduced tangible changes in the economic and political climate in the country. In the first place, the main enterprises of Indian heavy industry were concentrated in the state sector, namely, those enterprises that were crucial to the industrialisation drive; secondly, the state sector was developing more rapidly than the private sector. Indeed between 1951 and 1961 the paid-up capital of state enterprises increased from 263 million to 5,452 million rupees (i.e., it multiplied over twenty times), while the increase in the private sector was from 7,491 million to 11,894 million (just over 50 per cent). In 1951 the paid-up capital of state enterprises equalled no more than approximately 3.5 per cent of that of the private companies, while in 1961 the percentage had risen to 46 per cent.

The state sector of an undeniably anti-imperialist character was viewed differently by the different political groupings in the country. The democratic forces consider it as the most important economic factor, enabling to implement the programme of democratic reform, in particular to check private capitalist enterprise, while reactionary groups were calling for its subsequent development to be blocked and subordinated to the interests of the Indian big bourgeoisie.



## The Beginnings of Industrialisation and Its Special Features

The role of the state was steadily assuming more and more importance as the colonial and feudal economic structure of India was being reorganised. Apart from state enterprise (both in the sphere of production and circulation) another important aspect of state capitalism consisted in various forms of state regulation of the economy, aimed at consolidating national production, control over the activities of the private sector, stimulation (or holding back) of the development of one or another branch of the economy (both in the private and the state sector).

The state economic and financial institutions while exercising these control and regularisation devices, relied on a series of special laws: the Capital Issues (Control) Act of 1947; the Foreign Exchange Regulations Act of 1947; Import and Export (Control) Act of 1947; the Bank Act of 1949; the Industries (Development and Regulation) Act of 1951, which stipulated, in particular, the licensing rules permitting enterprises to operate and expand their production capacities; the Essential Commodities Act of 1955, which empowered the government to fix prices; the Companies Act of 1956 (amended in 1960), which restricted the functions of the managing agencies, and a number of other legislative measures.

Apart from regulation and control of the private sector the state also gave direct encouragement to private capitalist enterprise. Special measures were introduced to this end in the context of price policy and also protectionist tariffs and tax exemptions, etc. An important part in this respect was played by various state and quasi-state investment bodies providing credit for industrial development: the Industrial-Finance Corporation of India (founded in 1948), several State Financial Corporations set up after 1951, the National Industrial Development Corporation (founded in 1954), the Industrial Credit and Investment Corporation of India (founded in 1955) and others. In 1955 the country's largest private commercial bank, the Imperial Bank, was nationalised and renamed the State Bank of India and in 1964 the Industrial Development Bank of India was opened. All in all, private entrepreneurs were granted a total of 9,000 million rupees in financial help from the state between 1956 and 1966.

Special national corporations were also set up to finance small-scale industries. Apart from granting financial aid the state provided considerable support to both small-scale mechanised and small-scale manual production units through supplies of equipment, raw materials and assistance in selling finished articles, etc.

State aid facilitated the accumulation of capital both in the higher and lower echelons of the capitalist structure.

Government measures aimed at regulating and stimulating national production gave rise to major changes in the scale and

orientation of capital investment in the Indian economy. Capital investment in the basic assets of industrial enterprises between 1948 and 1962 increased from 9,100 million rupees to 36,000 million (based on 1948 prices). The bulk of all new investments were concentrated in heavy industry—ferrous and non-ferrous metallurgy, mechanical engineering, oil-processing, the chemical industry, power engineering and the production of construction materials.

Increased investment in heavy industry led to substantial changes in the correlation between Department I and Department II. In 1951, for instance, the four main branches of Department I (mechanical engineering and metal-working, ferrous metallurgy, the chemical and cement industries) accounted for only 24.3 per cent of the total sum invested in the manufacturing industry, whereas in 1955 this figure had risen to 31.5 per cent, and to as much as 48.9 per cent by 1960. By the mid-1960s both departments of industry accounted for equal shares of gross output in terms of value.

This growth in investment made it possible to accelerate the country's industrial development. Between 1937 and 1947 the annual growth in industrial output had been 0.6 per cent, whereas in 1951-1955 it had risen to 6.5 per cent, in 1956-1960 to 7.3 per cent, and in 1961-1962 to 7.7 per cent. Moreover, the largest growth figures were to be found in the up-to-date branches of heavy industry.

Between 1948 and 1964 the overall industrial output of India rose by 150 per cent.

It was the state which played the central, guiding role in these early stages of the country's industrialisation. The participation of the state in large-scale enterprise led to the creation in India of new branches of industry which provided the basis for reproduction on an independent national foundation. The appearance of state capitalism on the economic arena of India, in particular within the field of planning, made it possible for the state sector to achieve high growth rates. The share of the state sector in the gross output of industry as a whole came to around 18 per cent by 1966.

The industrialisation of India brought forth certain contradictory trends within the country's economic development. After the completion of the first five-year plan, in the course of which the main negative consequences of the country's partition affecting the economic sphere had been surmounted, it was decided that industrialisation should be effected mainly through development of the state sector. In the government's new "Resolution on Industrial Policy" (April 30, 1956) considerable additions were made to the list of branches of industry drawn up in the 1948 Resolution, in which the state would enjoy exclusive or preferential rights of enterprise. However, by the late 1950s and early 1960s considerable concessions on this list were being made in response to pressure from the big national bourgeoisie to meet the interests of the private sector.

Despite restrictions imposed on private capital in certain



branches of the national economy, on the whole state capitalism in India made possible a considerable extension of private capitalist enterprise, and also accelerated the concentration and centralisation of capital, particularly at the top. The position enjoyed by the monopolist élite of the big bourgeoisie had also been consolidated. It is revealing to note that 73 of the largest corporations obtained over half of all state financial aid set aside for the private sector under the second and third five-year plans (1956-1966).

The broader scope for action now enjoyed by the Indian big bourgeoisie added to the disproportion between the development of small and large-scale enterprise. Typical of the economic structure of India at that time was the presence of a variety of economic patterns; moreover, the majority of the working population was concentrated in the lower economic sectors (semi-natural, small-scale commodity and small-scale capitalist patterns), whether in agriculture, industry, or other spheres of the economy. Since industrialisation towards the late 1960s had only affected up-to-date factory production, the gulf between the lower and higher forms of capitalist enterprise was constantly growing. When heavy industry achieved a considerable lead in growth rates by the middle of the 1960s, the gulf between the development of heavy and light industry appeared still more striking. All this produced considerable problems on the market for manufactured goods, and gave rise to inadequate utilisation of the nation's production capacity, and finally meant that industrialisation would take longer and that plan targets would not be reached. The crucial factor which was holding back this whole scheme for the transformation of the economic structure of India was the continuing backwardness of agriculture—the main branch of the country's economy.

### Changes in Agriculture

Industrialisation and the advance of capitalism in the towns began to have an increasing impact on the situation in the Indian countryside. The implementation of agrarian reforms also created conditions that favoured the capitalist transformation of the Indian agrarian system.

Since agrarian reforms had not been introduced in half the country (the areas where the *rayatwari* system obtained) and since in the areas where formerly the *zamindari* system of land-ownership had been in force much of the land, even prior to the reform, had already been concentrated in the hands of the protected and occupancy tenants, patterns of land relations after the reform were still characterised by inequalities in the distribution of land for cultivation between the various groups of landholders. A certain improvement in the techniques of farming on operational holdings

owned either by landlords or the more prosperous peasants, and an extension of the area under cultivation led to a rise in gross agricultural output of 65 per cent in the period 1951-1965.

However, this growth in agricultural production per head of the population turned out to be much smaller in practice, since the overall population over the same period had risen by approximately 25 per cent. By the mid-1960s local agricultural production no longer fully met the country's needs for foodstuffs and certain types of agricultural raw materials. The backwardness of this all-important branch of the Indian economy was to be attributed first of all to the fact that the bulk (up to 60 per cent) of operational units constituted uneconomical, semi-subsistence and subsistence peasant holdings.

The agricultural policy pursued by the National Congress Government without doubt promoted the advance of capitalism in agriculture. Extension of the area under cultivation (between 1951 and 1966 7.5 million acres of virgin and fallow lands were opened up by cultivation by state tractor organisations), the construction of large and small irrigation installations (the total area of irrigated land doubled between 1951 and 1966), the building of roads, the creation of a network of stock-breeding and seed-growing farms, the dissemination of advanced agro-technical experience and the carrying out of a whole complex of socio-cultural measures through the state organisation for rural development set up in 1951 (the so-called community projects) all helped build up a modern infra-structure in agriculture.

The development, with government financial and organisational support, of service co-operative societies (credit, marketing and consumer) helped to ease out to a certain extent from the sphere of rural credit and trade some of the lower forms of capital—the usurious and merchant capital. The share of co-operatives in agricultural credit rose more than fivefold between 1951 and 1961. The rural bourgeoisie that was now emerging was turning into the most numerous group in the lowest stratum of the capitalist class in India.

### Changes in the Position of the Various Groups of the National Bourgeoisie

Major changes had meanwhile also taken place in the position of various groups in the urban commercial and industrial bourgeoisie. As a result of the growth of Indian-owned state and private enterprise and also due to the policy of economic protectionism, the influence of the foreign bourgeoisie was now on the wane. However, while the overall share of foreign capital in the Indian economy had dropped, its share of investment in large-scale industry was falling only very slowly. Foreign investment in the



manufacturing industries was growing at almost the same speed as private Indian investment and between 1948 and 1960 it grew by 150 per cent (from 700 million to 1,840 million rupees). The largest influx of capital to new branches of industry went to the oil-refining industry, the chemical industry, mechanical engineering and the electrical industry. The influence of the foreign monopolies was much greater than their actual share in investments, since now that there was new scope for penetration of the economy (through joint companies, the provision of licenses, agreements on technical co-operation) the sphere of their interests in India had grown far more quickly than the sum total of their investments. From this it follows that the degree of control over the activity of certain industrial companies on the part of foreign capital had decreased, while its impact on the whole reproduction mechanism and its injection of accumulated capital into the private sector (through currency transactions and technical assistance) had increased. To some extent this applied to the state sector as well.

Against this background of an industrial boom created by state investment and the protectionist measures introduced by the government, there had been a marked growth in the economic might of Indian capital. The paid-up capital of private joint-stock companies in India between 1947 and 1962 grew from 4,800 million to 12,500 million rupees, almost three times over. The share of large-scale capital and the monopolies was growing steadily at the same time. This group of capitalists was enjoying all-out support from the state within the framework of the five-year plans, since it was then transferring its accumulated capital to the sphere of heavy industry. The foreign monopolies were also affording big capital considerable help in the form of credit and equipment. Over 80 per cent of all large-scale enterprises in the private sector had been built in conjunction with Western firms.

All this meant that a small group of particularly powerful companies, that enjoyed special links with the Indian monopolies, was forging ahead. For example, in the period 1956-1960 companies with paid-up capital of over ten million rupees accounted for 68 per cent of all issued share capital, whereas in 1961 this figure had risen to 70 per cent and in 1962 to 78 per cent. The assets of manufacturing companies in the Tata group increased from 700 million to 4,000 million rupees between 1947 and 1960, and those of the Birla group from 400 million to 3,000 million rupees over the same period. Apart from these two groups there were four others with assets over 1,000 million rupees each in the early 1960s (Dalmia Jain, Mukherji, M. Chettiyar, Hirachand Kilachand).

The level of concentration was just as high in the banking world: in the mid-1960s the country's seven largest banks controlled by the Indian monopolist groups and representing about ten per cent of the total number of scheduled banks, accounted for 65 per cent of the total deposits placed with these banks.

The fact that the Indian big bourgeoisie was now far stronger than before, and likewise its monopolist élite, and that these circles were working closely with the foreign monopolies, led to increasingly reactionary trends in India's economic and social development. The contradictions in the ranks of the national bourgeoisie were now growing and this was in part to be explained by the marked increase in the numbers of the lower strata of the commercial and industrial bourgeoisie.

After 1947 substantial changes took place in the sphere of small-scale industry. An important factor in this process was the rapid growth of small mechanised establishments that were ousting small-commodity production and manufactories in the traditional branches of light industry and also in those new branches of industry which were now becoming widespread (light engineering, metal-working, the light chemical industry, etc.). In this latter group some of the small-scale entrepreneurs co-operated with the big capitalists, carrying out a series of auxiliary production operations. The official state policy to encourage this sphere of industry promoted a considerable increase in the ranks of small entrepreneurs: some spheres of production were officially reserved for the small entrepreneur, they were given subsidies and guaranteed markets, credit facilities and tax exemptions. In addition to this extension of mechanised small-scale industry, growth was also to be observed in the number of "non-organised" enterprises (mechanised undertakings employing up to ten workers and manufactories employing up to twenty) the bulk of which were based mainly on family labour. Between 1952 and 1961 the total number of workers employed in this sector rose from 9,900,000 to 14,300,000. In 1960 small-scale enterprises and small factories accounted for 93 per cent of all industrial enterprises in India.

The preservation and even "extended reproduction" of small-scale industry (to no small degree artificially boosted) had two distinct consequences: on the one hand it led to an extension of the home market since many workers and considerable new capital were drawn into production; on the other the concentration and specialisation of production were held back by this phenomenon and for a long time high prices and production costs were the order of the day.

Meanwhile, the middle stratum of the industrial bourgeoisie, whose investment was still mainly centred in light industry, was growing more slowly than the groups of entrepreneurs at the top and bottom. This was the result first and foremost of the major restrictions the government had introduced for light industries (Department II), while encouraging small-scale enterprise and heavy industry. The fact that, while there was an enormous growth in the capital of joint-stock companies in India, their overall number in the period 1950-1963 fell from 27,500 to 25,500, demonstrates not only the accelerating process of capitalist concentration, but also the declining



position of the middle strata of the bourgeoisie. All these economic processes gave rise to rather sharp contradictions within the ranks of the Indian bourgeoisie.

### External Economic Ties.

#### Economic Co-operation with the Soviet Union

The main obstacle which India found herself up against when endeavouring to overcome her colonial backwardness was a serious shortage of productive capital (i.e., equipment, parts, industrial materials, fuel). India was suffering not only from the need to resort on an increasing scale to importing means of production, but also from a serious shortage of hard currency necessary for such purchases. This meant that, while carrying out the industrialisation programme, foreign aid, usually from foreign governments, was involved to a large degree. This foreign aid was used to import capital equipment, materials and to pay for the services of foreign experts.

The total sum of foreign private capital invested in India, according to figures provided by the Reserve Bank, came to 5,664 million rupees at the end of 1960, as against the much smaller sum of 2,558 million rupees in 1948. The annual gross inflow of foreign private investment came to 346.2 million rupees between 1956 and 1960 (40 per cent of which went on reinvestment) while the average annual net inflow of investment came to 219 million rupees. The main source of this private capital remained Britain (in 1960 British investment accounted for 78.6 per cent of the total foreign investment) and the United States ranked second among the foreign investors, accounting for 14 per cent of the total.

Economic aid in the form of foreign credits and subsidies was a still more important element in India's external economic relations. By the autumn of 1965 aid from capitalist countries had reached close on 35,000 million rupees (of which 14,000 million had come from the United States). Foreign credits and subsidies were used for the most part to develop various branches of the power industry, the transport system and some fields of the manufacturing and extracting industries, and also to pay for large deliveries of foodstuffs (mainly US wheat).

The flow of foreign private and state capital into India undeniably spurred on the country's industrialisation, but at the same time it helped to entrench the foreign monopolies and intensify India's integration into the world capitalist economy.

Relations with the USSR and the other socialist countries occupied a special place in India's external economic ties. The Soviet Union, in keeping with its policy of support for the national liberation movement of the peoples of the East and with the principles of friendship and mutual assistance, afforded India

substantial help in its efforts to achieve economic independence. The progressive aspects of Indian economic policy—such as the introduction of some degree of state planning, the creation of a powerful state sector, the industrialisation programme—were welcomed by the peoples of the Soviet Union and the entire socialist community.

On the basis of a series of agreements concluded between 1955 and 1965 the Soviet Union approved long-term credits for India totalling over 600 million rubles. The main focus of Soviet aid to India was in ferrous metallurgy: it was into this branch of industry that a large part of all Soviet credits was channelled. The Bhilai steel works built with Soviet assistance, which came to symbolise Soviet-Indian friendship, was smelting close on a third of all the steel produced in India as early as 1966. In 1967 construction work to expand this plant was completed and production then began aimed at tripling the targets as originally planned. That same year work began on the construction of a large new metallurgical works at Bokaro.

The oil industry ranked second among those spheres in which the Soviet Union supported India's industrial development. The USSR helped India to become independent of the international imperialist monopolies in an undertaking as vitally important as the supply of liquid fuel.

Economic co-operation between the Soviet Union and India was aimed at setting up whole industrial complexes in the iron and steel and mining industries. The Soviet Union helped India to build heavy engineering plants in Ranchi and Durgapur which were destined to promote subsequent advance in this field as well.

Electric power also loomed large in the programme of Soviet economic aid to India. The USSR built completely or in part eleven electric power stations in India, which taken together account for 20 per cent of all the electric power generated in the country. In addition to these three main aspects of Soviet-Indian economic co-operation, further agreements were drawn up providing for aid in the instrument-making, pharmaceutical and coal industries, fishing, agriculture and the training of specialists, etc. By the end of the 1960s sixty Soviet-backed projects were either underway or complete. In the early 1970s factories built with aid from the Soviet Union accounted for 30 per cent of steel production, 85 per cent of the manufacture of heavy equipment, 60 per cent of heavy equipment for the power industry, 25 per cent of the aluminium and 80 per cent of the oil produced in India. Soviet loans to India are repaid through deliveries of Indian commodities, which has meant that Soviet economic assistance has had a profound and far-reaching effect on India's industrialisation and helped among other things to promote her export industries.

An important indicator of the growing economic ties between these two countries has been the rapid growth of the trade turnover



between them. Since Independence trade between India and the Soviet Union has multiplied thirty times over. The Soviet Union now ranks second among India's trading partners.

#### THE EMERGENCE OF THE NEHRU LINE IN INDIA'S DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN POLICY

The development of independent India's economy along state-capitalist lines and the implementation of a number of economic measures aimed at holding in check foreign capital and gradually transforming the patterns of pre-capitalist relations in agriculture—all these served to consolidate the country's economic independence.

The first three five-year plans were characterised by parallel development of the state and private sectors in keeping with the conception of a "mixed economy" formulated by Jawaharlal Nehru. The economic policy of the National Congress during the 1950s and mid-1960s was part and parcel of the Nehru domestic and foreign policy line.

The general elections of 1951/52 consolidated a certain shift to the Left in the Indian political arena and strengthened the Left and Centrist forces within the ruling party. In a situation when the democratic wing within the National Congress was becoming more active and likewise the mass organisations of the working people, now under the influence of the parties of the Left, Nehru was able to introduce a number of important measures in the field of domestic policy aimed at the further consolidation of the foundations of bourgeois democracy in India.

Insofar as the emergence of a modern bourgeois society in India was taking place at a time when the world as a whole was moving in the direction of socialism, and anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist traditions still predominated in the national liberation movement, it was inevitable that such trends should be reflected in the programme for the construction of a "society on the socialist pattern". At Nehru's suggestion this formula was incorporated into the official Congress programme at the party's session held in Avadi in 1955. In practice "Congress socialism" did not imply the elimination of private property or the system of exploitation rooted in that property. At the same time Congress policy at this period did provide for an emphasis on development in the state sector, for the extension of various forms of state control and regulation of the private sector, support for the small entrepreneur in various spheres of the economy and the implementation of anti-feudal and anti-imperialist socio-economic changes.

#### The Reorganisation of States in 1956

Among the main innovations in the field of domestic policy introduced after the Congress had adopted the resolution on the construction of a "society on the socialist pattern" was the reform of India's administrative and territorial divisions aimed at reducing tension stemming from differences between the various linguistic groups of the sub-continent. According to the Constitution of India, twenty-eight states had been formed which were linked together in three large groups, A, B, and C. The new administrative and political divisions reflected the fact that the princely states no longer existed; however, the new state boundaries did not on the other hand reflect the linguistic divisions of India: they did not reflect ethnic areas but rather the administrative and territorial divisions, which had grown up over the course of time during the era of British rule in India. The struggle to resolve the national question came to overlap more and more with the concerns of the mass movement, particularly the peasants' struggle. This development was particularly marked in Telengana and Andhra where the central government made a number of concessions to the regional interests of the national bourgeoisie and the broad front of the democratic movement, and created administrative divisions based on ethnic considerations.

A leading force behind the creation of the state of Andhra consisted of petty-bourgeois strata of the Telugu-speaking (or Andhra) people. In September 1952 one of the leaders of the petty-bourgeois wing in the National Congress in Madras, Potti Sriramalu, published in the press a special appeal to the leaders of the National Congress and the government of Madras state, in which he demanded an immediate decision on whether or not a new state of Andhra was to be created. At the end of October by which time there had been no positive answer to his appeal, he began a hunger strike. On December 15, 1952 Sriramalu died after fasting for fifty-eight days.

Sriramalu's death was followed by mass demonstrations against the central government and the Madras government throughout the Andhra region. This was the most resolute mass action that India had seen since the war. Strikes also began at the large factories and all these developments led the central government to adopt a resolution on December 19, 1952, approving the creation of a state of Andhra. However the state only actually came into being a year later.

Although the formation of the state of Andhra was a definite step towards the resolution of the national question concerning the settlement of the Telugu people, this did not mean that the problem had been solved once and for all, for there still remained large sections of the Telugu people in the Telengana district of Hyderabad.



The next stage in the resolution of the national problem covers the period from 1953-1956, when the administrative and territorial divisions of India were reviewed. In May 1953 the Working Committee of the National Congress adopted a resolution providing for the creation of a special government commission to draw up proposals for the reorganisation of the states, that would take into account the linguistic composition of the population. In December of that year the Commission for the States Reorganisation Commission was set up, and in 1955 it published its report. On August 31, 1956 the Bill based on the Commission's report was passed by the Parliament, and in September the necessary amendments were made to the Constitution. On November 1, 1956 the new law concerning the administrative and territorial divisions of India came into force. Fourteen new states had been set up and six Union territories administered by the central government.

After the political map of India had thus been redrawn and these new states created, there were fears in the central government and the Congress leadership lest all questions connected with the new administrative divisions and the creation of states based on national considerations would inevitably give rise to particularism and lead to more serious contradictions and strife between the various linguistic groups. In order to foster centripetal trends it was decided to create five zones each with a zonal council, in which representatives of the central government and the governments of the states concerned would come together. The zonal councils would concern themselves with questions of co-ordination and planning, programmes of economic development for the various states and also with problems of national minorities in the new states; it would be their function to settle border disputes, questions connected with the joint utilisation of hydroelectric schemes involving more than one state, the transport network, etc.

### **The National Question After the Reorganisation of the States**

The implementation of this administrative and territorial reform in 1956 did not resolve the national question in India once and for all. The struggle to achieve the creation of new states based on linguistic divisions continued particularly in those areas, where administrative divisions bringing together the speakers of a variety of languages were retained (Bombay, Assam, Punjab).

In the state of Bombay a campaign was launched calling for the secession of Gujarat from Maharashtra. The Communist Party succeeded in creating a broad united front, and this new development caused the National Congress to lose large numbers of seats at the second general election in 1957. As a result of this mass struggle, it was decided in the spring of 1960 to form the

separate states of Maharashtra (with its capital in Bombay) and Gujarat (with its capital in Ahmadabad).

In the Punjab the national question emerged as directly linked with the religious issue, for a struggle was waged there calling for the creation of a state to be known as "Punjab-subah" (i.e., for a Punjab state bringing together all the Punjabi-speaking people and for settling the Sikh community there).

The population of the Punjab consisted of two main groups, Punjabi- and Hindi-speaking. The religious composition of the population was not equally divided: 30 per cent were Sikhs. Nor did the religious and national divisions coincide, as some of the Hindus spoke Punjabi and some Sikhs spoke Hindi.

After World War II the question as to the role and place of the Punjabi language in the cultural life of the Punjabis was brought up by the Akali Dal. From then on the language question became one of the major issues in this party's programme and also in its tactics in the political struggle.

Under pressure from the leaders of the Akali Dal, in 1949 the government declared the Punjab to be a state with two official languages: primary education in areas populated mainly by Hindi-speaking people would be in Hindi and in areas where Punjabi-speaking people predominated, instruction would be in the latter language. Nevertheless, as in the colonial period, so now newspapers, magazines and books continued to be published mainly in Hindi and Urdu; apart from English it was this latter language that continued to be used for official correspondence. For this reason on the eve of the 1951/52 general elections the Akali Dal first put forward as an official slogan the demand for the creation of a separate state which would bring together all sections of the Punjabi-speaking population.

However, the party had no real social programme. As a result the bulk of the petty-bourgeoisie and also the mass of the toiling peasantry supported the National Congress. At the 1952 elections the Akali Dal suffered a major defeat, securing only 22 of the 122 seats in the state's legislature. After this the slogan "Punjab-subah" was lent a somewhat different emphasis: while the campaign on the grassroot level had formerly been waged to achieve reorganisation of the state on the basis of language, after the 1952 elections in an effort to restore its former prestige among the Sikh population of Punjab, the Akali Dal replaced the first slogan by a demand for a "Punjab-subah" with a predominantly Sikh population.

When the new state of Punjab was formed in 1956 by bringing together the Punjab and Pepsu, the National Congress, taking into account the wishes of the Punjabi people and the popularity of the "Punjab-subah" slogan among many different strata of the population, put forward the so-called regional formula which was then adopted and implemented in the Punjab. So-called regional



councils attached to the Punjab government and the legislature were set up: the regional council of the Punjab, and the regional council of Haryana (areas with a predominantly Hindi-speaking population). These councils included members from the relevant districts and ministries—Sikhs or Hindus. These were advisory organs which concerned themselves with questions of economic development on the territory in question, mainly supervision of the distribution of government credits, and also with questions of education and culture.

Punjabi was recognised as the official language of the state, while Hindi remained as its second official language. As for official correspondence at district level this was carried on in Punjabi in the Punjab districts and in Hindi in Haryana.

The adoption of this regional formula represented an important step forward towards a resolution of the national question in the Punjab.

On the basis of this formula an agreement between the National Congress and the Akali Dal was reached for the first time since Independence. The two parties, the most influential in the Punjab, ran on a joint ticket in the second general elections in 1957.

However at the end of the 1950s religious-chauvinist elements gained the upper hand in the Akali Dal and soon launched a campaign calling for the Punjab to be divided on a religious basis. After a long struggle the Punjab was divided into two states in 1966, Haryana with its predominantly Hindi-speaking population was set up as a separate unit.

The problem of national autonomy was no less acute in North-East India in the state of Assam, where separatist movements of such tribes as the Nagas, Mizos and Lushai became active in the early 1950s. The Naga movement developed into a guerilla war against government troops and police detachments. Finally the state of Nagaland was set up at the beginning of 1963 and this development gave new impetus to the movements seeking autonomy in other tribal areas of Assam.

Apart from movements calling for the creation of new states on ethnic grounds, another important aspect of the struggle over the national question in India was the issue of an official language. As early as 1949 the Constituent Assembly had decided almost unanimously that Hindi in the Devanagari script would be the official language, while English would still be used as the second official language over a fifteen-year period.

In June 1955 the President of India set up an Official Languages Commission to be headed by B.G. Kher. The Commission was to submit recommendations to the President regarding the wider use of Hindi in the Republic of India for official purposes. When making these recommendations the Commission was to take into account India's economic and cultural development, and also the interests of the population living in the

non-Hindi-speaking areas. The Commission was engaged in carrying out this survey for over a year. In August 1956 it submitted its report to the President, who in August of the following year placed it before the Parliament. The Commission approved the principles laid down in the Constitution on the subject of language and pointed out that it was impossible to use English as a means of instruction for the broad masses of the Indian population. The programme for compulsory primary education could only be implemented if the local Indian languages were used. Hindi was also seen as suitable for the official language in view of the fact that it was the language spoken by a majority of the Republic's population.

The publication of the Commission's report by no means put an end to disagreements over the language issue. Moreover, in the wake of the reorganisation of administrative and territorial divisions in 1956 on the basis of language, the question of the official language had become a still more controversial issue. A large number of prominent politicians and public figures opposed the Commission's recommendations particularly in Tamilnad and Bengal.

In September 1957 a Parliamentary Committee was set up under Home Minister G.B. Pant to review the official language question. The Committee was called upon to submit its views on the Official Language Commissions report to the President of the Republic. The Committee's report was submitted to the President in April 1959. The Committee suggested that after 1965, when Hindi was to become the main official language, English should be retained as a second official language for purposes to be designated by Parliament and for whatever period appeared necessary. Like the Commission before it, the new Committee recommended that a plan for the transition from English to Hindi be elaborated by the central government.

However, it soon became clear that the fifteen-year period which came to an end in 1965 was insufficient for English to be replaced by Hindi. At a session of the Parliament in 1962 it was announced that the government had decided to postpone the replacement of English by Hindi for an indefinite period. It was also decided to step up efforts to elaborate specialist terminologies in Hindi and to introduce Hindi as the medium of instruction at the university level.

These decisions aroused considerable opposition in bourgeois nationalist circles, particularly in South India. Demonstrations were organised in many parts of the country, protesting at the introduction of Hindi as the compulsory language in schools. The question as to the language to be used in schools and in business was a controversial issue of domestic politics from the end of the 1950s onwards.



## The Peasant Movement During the Implementation of Agrarian Reforms

The campaign to resolve the national question was gradually being absorbed by the mass democratic movement. After the general elections the political climate was one that made feasible a struggle for unity in the organised peasant movement. In the wake of the negotiations between the Kisan Sabha and the United Kisan Sabha many local branches of the two organisations merged and in 1953 the chairman of the United Kisan Sabha, the revolutionary democrat Indulal Yagnik, was elected president of the Kisan Sabha. In April 1953 the Kisan Sabha held its 11th session in Cannanore (Kerala) and after that the organisation began to hold annual sessions on a regular basis. The session reviewed the work that had been carried out in order to revitalise the organisation's activities, and the strategic and tactical tasks of the peasants' struggle for the future were charted. The new Kisan Sabha programme, which took account of the agrarian reforms recently implemented, was formulated in a "Statement of Policy" adopted by the session. The programme called upon the peasant organisations at state and district level to set up a broad anti-feudal front.

While the agrarian reforms were being implemented the nature of the peasant movement began to change. The main task before the mass movement at this stage was to demand that the legislation abolishing the *zamindari* system be carried through as rapidly as possible, and then extended to cover other types of large landed estates as well, and to protest against the eviction of tenant farmers from the large landed estates.

In the second half of the 1950s the landlords and rich peasants decided to make the most of the situation resulting from the new legislation concerning tenancy, which gave them the right to evict tenants in order allegedly to start farming their land themselves and they embarked on mass-scale "land clearance". Tens and hundreds of thousands of tenant farmers lost their rights of hereditary tenure. Resistance on the part of these peasants to the wave of evictions became the main activity of the poor peasants' struggle at that period.

Mass action (rallies, demonstrations, etc.) was supported by efforts within the Parliament by the Communists and democrats.

In many parts of the country outright clashes between peasants and landlords were the order of the day (Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Punjab, Bihar, Assam). Under pressure from this mass-scale peasant movement the governments in the majority of the states issued decrees in 1954 banning the eviction of tenant farmers.

Another form which the fight for land took was the occupation of state-owned wasteland by peasants who owned little or no land

(in Travancore-Cochin, Madras, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal), and also resistance on the part of poor peasants to the coercive consolidation of land holdings, during which process the plots of rich peasants were squared off.

At the same time the peasants were also campaigning for improved conditions of tenancy, mainly in the *rayatwari* areas, where no restrictions had been imposed on landlord possessions as yet.

The peasants with small holdings of land came out actively against increases in direct taxation of the rural population, calling for the fixing of prices for agricultural produce at levels advantageous for rural producers.

As before all strata of the peasantry, and even the small-scale landlords, were drawn into this economic struggle. While the land reforms were being implemented and the economic and social stratification of the peasantry was proceeding at a more rapid pace than before, the more prosperous peasants began gradually to desert the movement.

The struggle of the agricultural workers was also gaining ground at that time. The resolutions on the agrarian question drawn up by the plenary session of the CPI's Central Committee in April 1954, based on the principle that peasant unity should be preserved, was influential in helping the peasant unions to reach a correct analysis of the situation at a time when the balance of class forces was changing in the countryside. In these resolutions special attention was paid to the need to develop independent organisations of the agricultural labourers.

The implementation of the laws abolishing the *zamindari* system which had in the main been completed by 1957-1958, the carrying out of legislation regulating landlord-tenant relations, and the development of various capitalist forms of co-operation in the rural areas brought significant changes to the Indian countryside. Social contradictions within the ranks of the peasantry began to increase, and the united peasant front was beginning to split up. In a number of states the class composition of the rank-and-file Kisan Sabha organisations began to change: in the main they were turning into bodies defending the rights of the poor peasants. The desertion of the rich peasants left the Kisan Sabha organisations considerably weaker in many states and led to a drop in membership after 1955, when it had been more than a million.

In an effort to enhance its influence among the masses, the Congress leadership adopted a decision to consolidate the rank-and-file organisations in 1958 by creating the "Mandal Samiti" and setting up "peasant divisions" in the Congress committees at provincial and district level.

In order to counter this orientation of the peasant movement revolutionary-democratic elements, and in particular the Com-



munist Party of India and the Kisan Sabha, decided to wage a wide-scale propaganda campaign in the villages. However, despite the Communists' efforts the peasant unions did not succeed in developing their activities any further. The membership of the Kisan Sabha fell from 1,087,000 in 1955 to 572,000 in 1959-1960.

In the period 1955-1960 the influence of the Kisan Sabha in some provinces declined considerably, particularly in certain parts of Andhra and Bengal, which until then had been the bastions of the movement. This fact was acknowledged at the 5th Extraordinary Congress of the CPI in the spring of 1958. An important contribution to the strengthening of the Kisan Sabha was made by the plenary session of the CPI's National Council in October 1958 (Madras), which adopted a resolution relating to the agrarian question. A salient factor in this resolution was the call for an alliance of the whole of the peasantry on the one hand, and the neutralisation of the richer echelons of the peasantry.

Despite the fact that the mass peasant movement, particularly its more organised detachments, manifested a certain weakness after the agrarian reforms had been introduced and went through a decline in comparison with the achievements during the years 1952-1955, it nevertheless exerted considerable influence on the ideological and political struggle over the agrarian question and on the agrarian policy devised by the national bourgeoisie.

### **The Labour Movement.**

#### **The Communist Party of India: 1952-1962**

Another important form of mass-scale political action of the working people of independent India was the economic and political struggle of the working class. The economic struggle of the proletariat had gained considerable ground since Independence: in comparison with the 1930s the average annual total of strikes in the 1950s had increased fivefold, while the number of working people involved in the strikes had risen by 30 per cent.

Indian white-collar workers were now being actively drawn into the strike movement. The large strikes of the late 1950s were on a nation-wide scale. These included the general strike at the Tata steel works in Jamshedpur (1958), the general strike of plantation workers (1958) and the strike at the tram-depots of Calcutta (1958). In 1959 the jute industry was brought to a standstill by strikes, all the teachers came out on strike in West Bengal, and 1960 was marked by large-scale strikes of textile-workers, the workers in the coir industry and also a five-day general strike of blue- and white-collar workers from state-owned enterprises.

Apart from these economic strikes workers were starting to play an increasingly active part in mass political campaigns: in demonstrations and rallies organised by the Communist Party

against the food policy of the Congress Government in 1959 and in support of Kerala in the same year, to name but two instances.

The growth of the strike movement testified to the marked increase in trade-union activity at that time. In the twelve years since Independence trade-union membership had more than doubled. Between 1956-1957 and 1958-1959 membership had gone up by 35 per cent. Over this period organised labour had grown in number mainly thanks to the inflow of agricultural workers, including those from the plantations, the transport workers, communications workers and the factory workers.

According to the official figures for 1958-1959, close on three million workers from large-scale production, or 40 per cent of the total, were brought together in the trade unions.

The split in the All-India Trade Union Congress in 1947-1949 dealt an enormous blow to the development of the trade-union movement. In the two years that followed it was the trade union Hind Mazdur Sabha which enjoyed the greatest influence. Despite its reformist policies, this trade-union centre was seen by the workers as the more independent organisation in comparison with the Indian National Trade Union Congress, which at that time was firmly resolved to reject the strike movement.

After the end of 1951 as the internal situation was becoming more democratic and in an effort to put a stop to the sectarian approach adopted by a number of trade-union leaders work began towards reactivising AITUC unions. By the middle of 1953 the All-India Trade Union Congress had taken significant strides towards strengthening its mass support.

By 1954 another regrouping of the forces within the Indian trade-union movement had taken place.

The Hind Mazdur Sabha now enjoyed far less support than had been the case before: this situation was one of the consequences of the crisis which the Socialist Party of India was going through at this time. Two trade-union centres enjoyed growing influence at this time—the All-India Trade Union Congress and the Indian National Trade Union Congress. By this time the INTUC had secured more members than the All-India Trade Union Congress and the Hind Mazdur Sabha (the HMS had less members than the AITUC and enjoyed less influence).

By the middle of 1956 the leaders of the HMS were calling for trade-union unity and the re-establishment of a single trade-union centre for the whole country. The All-India Trade Union Congress and the United Trade Union Congress and also the independent all-India trade-union federations from individual branches of activity welcomed this initiative from the HMS. The leaders of the INTUC at that time did not make any official announcement on this question, but individual declarations from the leaders in the press pointed to the fact that the leadership of this trade-union centre was ready to negotiate a rapprochement with the HMS. Yet they were



against joining forces with the All-India Trade Union Congress, although they did not oppose co-operation of the trade unions affiliated to all the three centers in the independent all-India national federations.

It should be noted that between 1954/55 and 1956/57 the Indian National Trade Union Congress was obliged to change its tactics to some extent. It was precisely at this stage that activists in the INTUC sometimes supported and even led workers' action in support of immediate economic demands.

A significant achievement of the working class was the resolution passed by the 15th tripartite All-India Labour Conference in July 1957. Trade-union representatives proposed a special resolution on wage policy in the second five-year plan, which put forward recommendations that were far more radical than those provided for in the draft for the new five-year plan.

From 1957 onwards the demand that the resolutions of the 15th Labour Conference should be carried out became the main slogan of the Indian trade unions. A struggle to this end was waged inside the Parliament and in the tripartite conciliatory organisations and institutions. Strikes, demonstrations and other forms of mass action were organised in order to carry through the new stand on wage policy.

By 1957 the AITUC and the INTUC had emerged as the two leading central organisations in the country's trade-union movement.

Action organised by the AITUC in support of the workers' main demands and its leading role in the mass political campaigns of the working people, the consistent line it followed in the struggle to achieve working-class unity, and also the work of its members within the independent all-Indian trade-union federations explain to a large degree why the AITUC had consolidated its position by this time and was gaining ever wider support.

At the end of 1957 the AITUC came out in support of the country's industrialisation at its twenty-fifth jubilee session held at Ernakulam (Kerala).

The recommendations in the 2nd five-year plan to concentrate development in the state sector and heavy industry was coming in for severe criticism at that time from reactionary circles. In its review of the objectives for heavy industry as an essential prerequisite for the consolidation of India's national sovereignty, the AITUC declared its readiness to support that course of development as long as this was not at the expense of the working people.

While appealing to the workers to fight on to improve their economic position and extend their union rights, the AITUC proposed that the forms of their struggle be extended to include wider use of their parliamentary platform, negotiations, consultation, the press, protest demonstrations, and strikes as a last resort.

The stronger position which the Communist Party enjoyed within the labour movement by 1957 stood out in contrast to the weakening influence of the Congress-backed and in particular the Right-Socialist trade unions.

Meanwhile the industrialists were growing seriously alarmed at these successes scored by the labour movement. Under pressure from Right-wing forces a "Decree on Discipline" was issued in 1958, which restricted the rights of the unions to hold strikes and also granted certain privileges to the Indian National Trade Union Congress that supported the government. Over the three years that followed, this trade-union body was able to gain ground at the expense of the AITUC, the HMS and the United Trade Union Congress (UTUC) thanks to the support it received from government labour departments.

The INTUC was also helped in its efforts to strengthen its position by the introduction of special measures by the National Congress aimed at undermining the influence of the Left forces in the labour movement.

In September 1960 a special joint meeting of the National Congress and INTUC leaders was held for which the INTUC had been carrying out the groundwork during the preceding year in conjunction with the labour ministers from West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and some other states.

At this meeting a resolution was passed to the effect that from then on all activity by the ruling party in the sphere of labour policy would be implemented through the mediation of the INTUC and that organisation alone.

Delegates to this meeting recommended to the members of the National Congress that no trade unions be set up without consultation with the local branches of the INTUC, and that measures be introduced to ensure that National Congress members associate themselves only with the INTUC unions.

From 1958 onwards the leaders of the INTUC began to reject any proposals calling for a united trade-union movement. In 1958 and 1959 the INTUC leadership spread particularly violent anti-communist propaganda among the workers aimed at causing splits.

The problems now facing the organised labour movement as a result of the anti-communist splitting tactics of the INTUC leadership, were aggravated by the internal crisis in the trade-union organisations under the influence of the Socialists. In 1959 there was a split within the United Trade Union Congress, and in 1961 in the ranks of the HMS.

The All-India Trade Union Congress continued to wage a resolute struggle to promote trade-union unity despite opposition from Right-opportunist leaders of parallel union organisations.

The increasing scope of the mass workers' and peasants' movements was to a large extent attributable to the growing



influence of the Communist Party of India at this time. At its 3rd Congress (December 1953-January 1954) not only were efforts to overcome Left deviations assessed, but a broad programme of action was also drawn up aimed at promoting the creation of a broad democratic front. Yet the party at this time underestimated the correlation of class forces in the country, assuming that an economic and political crisis was growing higher and calling for the replacement of the Nehru Government by a united democratic government led by the working class. This stand made it more difficult for the CPI to establish strong links with the masses who were very much under the influence of the National Congress.

In June 1955 at a plenary session of the CPI's Central Committee, and later at the 4th CPI Congress in 1956, this stand was reviewed. The congress drew up a programme of more immediate demands, the indispensable basis of which would be work among the masses to set up an effective democratic front. The appeal for a change of government as an immediate objective in the struggle was dropped. This enabled the Communists to increase their mass following once again, an achievement that was to emerge unmistakably during the period immediately prior to the general election in the spring of 1957 and during that elections.

### **The Second General Elections. The First Communist Government in Kerala**

The results of the second general elections (to the Parliament and the state legislatures) reflected the changes that had taken place in the balance of social and political forces in India during the first half of the 1950s. The domestic policy of the Nehru Government aimed essentially at creating the economic foundations of independence and ousting colonial patterns from the country's social, cultural and political life had consolidated the popularity of the National Congress. This enhanced popularity together with a skilfully organised election campaign enabled the ruling party to achieve both an absolute as well as a relative increase in its number of votes (from 45 per cent in 1952 to 47.8 per cent in 1957) both in the Parliament and also in the state legislatures. The National Congress now enjoyed a larger absolute majority in the Lok Sabha of Parliament, and in the state legislatures it had won 65.1 per cent of all the seats.

The Praja Socialist Party, and the other Right-Socialist groupings as well, suffered a crushing defeat in the elections to the Parliament, although their overall total of seats in the state

legislatures (195 out of a total of 2,901; the National Congress won 1,889 seats and the Communist Party 162) was second after the National Congress. The Praja Socialist Party did not succeed in putting forward a clear political alternative to the National Congress programme. It also lost a good number of votes as a result of its anti-communist stand. The defeat of the PSP at this election added to the differences and rivalries within the socialist movement in India.

The consolidation of support for the National Congress in bourgeois and petty-bourgeois circles, and the declining influence of feudal rulers-cum-landlord groups within this party led to a certain intensification of both the Right-wing as well as the Left-wing opposition. The Hindu Maha Sabha that had lost many of its supporters was now replaced by a new political party—the Jan Sangh that was set up in 1951. The ideological framework of the political programme of the Jan Sangh was to a great extent based on Hindu communalism. The Jan Sangh party gained four seats in the Parliament and forty-six in the state legislatures. This party drew its support mainly from small- and medium-scale traders, and the more nationalistically inclined sections of India's intelligentsia and other middle urban strata, and finally from the rich peasants.

In Orissa, which was one of the most economically and politically backward states in the country, where many of the former princes and their followers still enjoyed considerable influence, a government was voted in that consisted of a coalition between the National Congress and representatives of the reactionary Ganatantra Parishad.

However the Left opposition was also growing stronger at this time; it was now coming to be regarded by the National Congress leadership as the most serious threat to its political monopoly. The Communist Party gained its main successes in the states of Kerala, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh. A historical landmark was reached in the advance of the communist movement in India when, at the beginning of April 1957, a Communist Government was formed in Kerala, which had won an absolute majority in the state legislature.

The government of Kerala led by the leader of the local Communists E.M.S. Nambudiripad, was working in difficult conditions. The economy of the state was centred on the production of valuable tropical crops (coconuts, cashew nuts, tea, rubber, spices, etc.) which played an important part in India's export trade; at the same time this was a region short of basic food crops and dependent on deliveries of rice from outside, this being the mainstay of the people's diet. Kerala was also one of the less industrially developed states: both the central government and the governments of the neighbouring states thus possessed powerful levers against the Left-opposition government in Kerala.



The Nambudiripad Government had to work within the framework of the bourgeois constitution, which also restricted its scope for the implementation of radical socio-economic changes. This meant that the democratic reforms drawn up by the new government did not extend beyond those already included in the National Congress programme. Nationalisation of public transport between the various towns was carried out, the reorganisation of the state apparatus was initiated, and a campaign was mounted to combat profiteering and corruption among the administration. The measures introduced in Kerala to systematise state finances now made it possible to balance the state budget for the first time in many years.

However the most important reforms of the new Kerala Government were in the spheres of agriculture and public education. The government issued a decree banning the eviction of tenant farmers from their holdings and also introduced legislation to do away with land-tenures of the *zamindari* type—known locally as *jenmi*. Holdings were distributed to landless peasants from available land owned by the state. A law providing for comprehensive agrarian reform was drawn up and laid before the legislature, which was aimed at cutting down the size of the large landed estates, enabling tenant farmers to assume rights of ownership over their holdings and allocating plots of land to the agricultural labourers.

In the sphere of public education the government attempted to place all private schools and colleges under state control.

The agrarian reform and the measures affecting education aroused fierce attacks from the Right opposition, particularly from the Catholic Church, which had a firm foothold in Kerala, and also chauvinist sections of the Hindu community rallying under the banners of the Nair Service Society (one of the highest castes in Kerala).

The opposition which was led by the local National Congress organisation did not confine itself to anti-government agitation. Between 1957 and 1959 it organised numerous rallies, demonstrations and protest strikes, etc., in an attempt to disrupt normal day-to-day life in the state, provoking unrest and thereby creating pretexts for intervention by the central authorities.

In the summer of 1959 a united opposition headed by the National Congress, and supported by local reactionary forces as well as those in the centre, fanned unrest and partially disrupted the normal functioning of the state administration. In July 1959 under the pretext of restoring "law and order", the legislature was dissolved, the elected government was dismissed from office and President's rule was imposed.

These events of 1957-1959 in Kerala were extremely significant for the communist movement of India, for they made clear the chances of assuming power by peaceful means. This issue was

central to the agenda of the 5th Extraordinary Congress of the CPI which was held in Amritsar (Punjab) in April 1958. The congress was devoted mainly to organisational questions, to the elaboration of forms and methods of party work, which would enable it to become a mass party and establish it firmly as the leading force in the trade-union and peasant movements. The work of the party in the period immediately prior to the congress was analysed in detail; both the work of the central apparatus of the party and that of the rank-and-file organisations were subjected to a critical assessment. The congress adopted the party's new Constitution and also a major resolution on questions of organisation.

Resolutions adopted earlier by the 20th Congress of the CPSU and the Moscow Meeting of Representatives of Communist and Workers' Parties of the socialist countries left their mark on the resolutions adopted by the 5th Congress of the CPI. The CPI was now planning to concentrate much of its work on setting up a united democratic front: soon, however, reformist as well as sectarian deviations were to manifest themselves in the work of the party organisations, as was later pointed out at the next party congress in 1961.

#### Political Developments Inside India After the Second General Elections

The successes scored by Left forces in the second general elections, the formation and work of a Communist Government in Kerala affected the balance of social and political forces within the country. The immediate reaction of the Right wing within the ruling party was the desertion of a number of its more conservatively inclined leaders (C. Rajagopalachari, N. G. Ranga and others) and the founding by them of a new Right-wing political organisation—the reactionary party known as the Swatantra (the Independents)—in August 1959. The party was led by Rajagopalachari, Ranga and also the former Right-wing socialist Masani. From the outset the leaders of the new party openly attacked many of the democratic measures introduced by the Nehru Government, including the agrarian reforms, the expansion of the state sector, etc. They strongly objected to the introduction of the planning principle into the organisation of India's economic life, fiercely upholding private property and "free enterprise". With regard to foreign policy they called for a reappraisal of positive neutralism, and for India's reorientation towards the West. The Swatantra Party which constituted the political organisation of the big bourgeoisie, landlords and former princes soon became the rallying point for all reactionary forces in India.

An offshoot of this consolidation of the Right opposition forces



was renewed activity on the part of the Hindu and Moslem communalist parties.

In the late 1950s it was the Right opposition with the support of the paramilitary organisation Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS) of the Hindu communalists led by Golwalkar which played the most prominent role in sparking off a new wave of religious fanaticism and intolerance of non-Hindus, particularly Moslems. The Jan Sangh Party opposed the democratic path of development which India was then following. In its propaganda it appealed to the Hindus' religious feeling, skilfully exploiting the political, cultural and social backwardness of a large proportion of the population which was in the main illiterate. Declaring itself to be the champion of "true nationalism", the RSS openly attacked the progressive principles inherent in the Nehru course then being pursued in both domestic and foreign policy.

This intensified activity on the part of the Jan Sangh and Hindu communalist organisations inevitably led to increased action on the part of reactionary organisations representing the Moslem community, in particular Jamaat-e-Islami-Hind (the Council of Indian Moslems) and Majlis-e-Ittihad-ul-Muslimin (the Alliance of Militant Moslems), which like the Jan Sangh were opposed to progressive social and economic reforms in industry and agriculture.

In addition to this renewed activity on the part of Hindu and Moslem communalist organisations, the Christian Church also now began to intervene more actively in political affairs. The Catholic Congress of Kerala, acting as the socio-political arm of the Christian Church in that part of India, was to play a most significant role in the struggle against the Communist Government in 1957, 1958 and 1959.

The expansion of communalism in India was attended by growing caste-based conflicts. Since Independence (in a country where a semi-feudal social and economic structure still predominated in rural areas and where the political organisation of the people was still weak) the spread of education, the introduction of universal franchise, the new system of rural administration based on the self-governing *panchayats* or village councils, and the resulting involvement of broad masses of the people in the political life of the country all tended to make caste groupings loom important as the most universal form of social organisation.

In this situation the "dominant castes", i.e., those which had control over the bulk of the land and which included the large section of the rich peasantry, made use of caste solidarity in order to strengthen their hold on the organs of state administration in their particular state or district. This situation, in turn, led to increased conflict between rival caste groups in the upper echelons of society on the one hand and between those in the lower and upper social strata on the other.

Caste conflicts in rural areas became particularly intense in the mid-1950s. They reflected class contradictions between the rural poor and landlord-kulak combine, who dominated rural society.

The mounting class struggle waged by the working people, conflicts arising out of religious, communal and caste differences, increased activity on the part of reactionary political organisations, the creation of the Swatantra Party—all these reflected the gradual polarisation of political forces in the country.

The situation which had taken shape in India was evaluated in the resolutions adopted at the 6th CPI Congress held in April 1961. The congress approved the conclusions drawn up at the Moscow Meeting of Representatives of Communist and Workers' Parties in November 1960. The congress reappraised the party's relations with the main political forces in the country, and analysed the dual stand adopted by the Indian national bourgeoisie. The congress elected the Party's leading body, the National Council, and this in turn elected the Central Committee headed by General Secretary A. K. Ghosh (who died in January 1962).

The congress elaborated a policy for the creation of a united democratic front headed by the working class and its party, which would incorporate all the main class forces, including that section of the national bourgeoisie that did not collaborate with the imperialists. To this end it was proposed that the CPI should co-operate in a united front with the democratic wing of the National Congress. However, the task of implementing this policy elaborated by the 6th CPI Congress was complicated both by the anti-communist stand adopted by the National Congress and socialist parties' leadership, and by the growing differences within the Communist Party itself.

### **The Third General Elections of 1962 and the Growing Conflict Within the National Congress**

The widening gulf between the main class forces of Indian society came clearly to the fore during the campaign leading up to the third general election to the Parliament and the state legislatures, that was held in February 1962. The election once again confirmed the position of the National Congress as the leading political party in the country: of the 520 seats in the Lok Sabha of the Parliament it secured 361, and it won the votes of 46.02 per cent of the electorate. However, as early as 1962 both the absolute and relative majorities enjoyed by the National Congress were reduced, for in comparison with the 1957 results the National Congress had lost over six million votes. The CPI now enjoyed a stronger position and returned 29 members of the Lok Sabha, which made it the largest opposition party. At the same time both



in the Parliament and the state legislatures the Right-wing parties had gained a larger following: in the Lok Sabha the Swatantra and the Jan Sangh parties taken together had secured 32.2 per cent of the seats (this meant that they had won 13.2 per cent of the votes as opposed to the 10 per cent won by the Communists).

However, neither the CPI, nor the National Congress at that time appreciated in the necessary degree the growing threat from the Right.

An important contributory factor with regard to the weakened position of the National Congress was the factional struggle going on in its own ranks which stemmed from two basic causes. On the one hand conflict was rife between various groupings in the leadership of the Congress organisations at state level, among the Congress members of Parliament and the state legislatures in many states, but in particular in the Hindi-speaking regions and West Bengal. This conflict reflected the deep contradictions between various groups of the national bourgeoisie and other propertied groups in Indian society. On the other hand the polarisation of the Right and the Left forces within the National Congress party was intensifying. In practical terms three main factions had now emerged within the party: the Centrist faction which supported Nehru and his associates; the Right faction which supported some ministers of the central government, together with certain leaders of larger Congress organisations in different states (such as Atulya Ghosh in West Bengal, C. B. Gupta in Uttar Pradesh); the Left faction which was less organised than the other two and whose leader was also a minister of the central government, K. D. Malaviya.

The factional struggle within the National Congress became still more intense after the 1962 election at which the representatives of the various groupings within the ruling party often virtually opposed the official Congress candidates.

The consolidation of the Right forces within the party was furthered by the outbreak of a Sino-Indian border conflict provoked by Peking in the autumn of 1962. These forces then began in practice to ally themselves with the conservative forces outside the party, which in the summer of 1963 demanded the resignation of the Nehru Government. In order to strengthen organisational unity within the party, in response to a proposal made by the chief minister of Madras, K. Kamaraj, the so-called Kamaraj plan was adopted in August of that year, which was aimed at arranging the transfer of a number of leading figures in the National Congress from ministerial posts to party work. Although as a result of the implementation of this plan the position of the Right wing within the reorganised central government suffered certain setbacks, a number of Right-wing leaders formed an unofficial group known as the "Syndicate" within the Congress leadership. Its influence on the policies of the ruling party became highly significant during the

1960s. At the session of the All-India Congress Committee held in Jaipur in the autumn of 1963 Kamaraj was elected president of the party.

Fierce differences within the National Congress came to the fore at its meeting in January 1964 in Bhubaneswar (Orissa), at which the Left group led by K. D. Malaviya put forward its version of the "Democratic Socialism" programme. However, after a fierce struggle the Left-wing proposals were rejected and a resolution on "Democratic Socialism" was passed and formulated in such a way as to incorporate obvious concessions to the Right forces within the National Congress.

The growing difficulties that now faced the National Congress at home and abroad in the late 1950s and early 1960s and the strife within the ruling party were a heavy blow to the nation's leader Jawaharlal Nehru. On May 27, 1964 he died. His death marked as it were the end of the first era in the history of independent India, during which the foundations for the country's domestic and foreign policy had been laid down.

#### India's Foreign Policy Between 1950 and 1964

After India had been proclaimed a Republic, Nehru's conception of India's foreign policy took shape as his government carried through various foreign policy acts and established the international ties of the new state. His course in this sphere of policy was one of positive neutralism, the foundation of which was India's non-alignment in a world dominated by two opposed camps. At the same time there was no hint of any isolationism in India's foreign policy. On the contrary, while India was still a Dominion it had nevertheless endeavoured to take up its place in the network of international relations, supporting the position of the newly liberated countries.

India's support for the national liberation movement in Africa and Asia, its defence of independent political and economic development in the countries of the Third World remained more or less consistent at the time when the Nehru line in Indian politics was taking shape.

India made a considerable contribution to the cessation of hostilities in Korea, although its stand as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council at the early stage of the conflict in 1952 had not always been consistent. The Indian Government opposed the charge of Chinese aggression in Korea, and later actively promoted efforts to achieve an armistice and organise the repatriation of prisoners of war.

India's appeals for a cessation of hostilities in Indo-China were still more consistent; she helped to bring about the signing of the



Geneva agreements and the subsequent partial settlement of relations in that part of South-East Asia in the period 1954-1956.

In the international arena India consistently called for an end to all types of local conflict, for enduring peace everywhere; she opposed the creation of military blocs and bases and the stationing of troops on foreign territory.

This stand in matters of foreign policy adopted by the Nehru Government gave rise to certain complications in India's relations with the Western countries. On the one hand India opposed more or less consistently colonialism and neo-colonialism, while on the other hand constant and growing pressure was being brought to bear on her by the imperialist forces, who did not shrink from using economic levers to this end. Although India rejected American military aid, in 1951-1952 a number of agreements were signed providing for technical co-operation with the United States which was thus providing a basis for subsequent American penetration of various spheres of the country's internal affairs.

India's relations with the socialist countries were developing in the direction of increasingly extensive co-operation in all spheres. In 1955 the leaders of India and the USSR exchanged visits thus laying the foundation for regular exchanges of government delegations at various levels. Relations between India and the other socialist countries, including the People's Republic of China, were developing in an equally positive way.

In 1954 an agreement was signed between India and China on Tibet which put an end to the differences between the two countries with regard to the status of that part of Central Asia. This agreement contained the famous five principles of peaceful coexistence ("panchsheel"). This step was followed by an exchange of visits between government delegations which served to consolidate friendly relations between the two countries.

Sino-Indian co-operation paved the way towards the success of the historic Bandung conference of non-aligned countries in 1955.

Yet the changes which had been brewing in China's domestic and foreign policy during the 1950s and 1960s gradually led to a deterioration in Sino-Indian relations, and even border clashes in 1959, again provoked by the Chinese side. In 1962 border conflict broke out once again and this time of a more serious nature involving major military clashes in the frontier region. The events of 1962 had a negative effect on the Indian political scene at home, for they were followed by an intensification of activity on the part of all anti-socialist and anti-communist forces in India. India's position in the sphere of foreign policy was also complicated by these developments, for in the course of the conflict with the Chinese People's Republic, a rapprochement between the latter and Pakistan had taken place and this in turn made reaching agreement

between Pakistan and India more difficult, particularly with regard to the Kashmir issue.

Although India succeeded in 1954 in reincorporating the former French colonial enclaves in the country under an agreement with France, and later in liberating Goa and other Portuguese colonies in India in December 1961, the problems standing in the way of a durable and lasting peace in the Indian subcontinent were by no means all resolved.



## THE STRUGGLE TO PURSUE THE NEHRU LINE (1964-1972)

### THE GROWING ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CRISIS

The increasing polarisation of social and political forces which began on the eve of the third general election (1962) aggravated still further the internal struggle within the country's main political parties, in particular the National Congress. The death of Nehru marked the end of a period of relative stability in the sphere of domestic politics, after which the country entered a period of mounting social and political conflict.

### Intensification of the Struggle Within the Congress Party

Within the ruling party the factional struggle began in earnest, now that the personal authority of Nehru was gone which had previously acted as something of a brake on such dissension. The new Prime Minister, L. B. Shastri, who had previously been able to follow a flexible policy of manoeuvring between the various factions, was now obliged to take more and more into account the interests of the influential groups, both within the central leadership of the Congress and also within the party's organisations at state level. The groups, which exercised control over the party apparatus in the states and which supported individual members of the central Congress leadership or of the central government, were becoming ever stronger. In this situation the role of the local "bosses" in the various Congress organisations had become much more important: as a rule, these "bosses" were working closely together with influential circles of the local bourgeoisie as in the case of Atulya Ghosh (West Bengal), C. B. Gupta (Uttar Pradesh) and Biju Patnaik (Orissa). The political weight of the Right-wing leaders within the Congress leadership was determined not only by their personal contacts at the centre, but also by the support from large organisations of the ruling party in the individual states (such as the support given Morarji Desai by the Congress organisation in Gujarat, or that given S. K. Patil in Maharashtra).

This growing role of local patronage within the Congress organisations led not only to a further increase in factional conflict within the party, but also to the emergence of a kind of bipolar

structure in the states, where rival factions often rallied to the support of the state's chief minister and the local party "boss". This latter trend became more and more conspicuous even at the centre, where after the death of Nehru the president of the National Congress, K. Kamaraj came to play a far more prominent role both in the implementation of policy within the party and also in determining the whole course the government would pursue.

During this struggle within the party the position of the Right wing was consolidated and it began to bring increasing pressure to bear on government policy.

The development of centrifugal trends within the country's largest party, and the growing strength of its Right wing began to leave its mark on all political affairs of India.

The weakening of the monolithic unity within the ruling party encouraged both the Left- and Right-wing opposition to employ more active tactics. In the context of increasing class conflict and at a time when many vital social problems remained to be solved, the struggle within a number of opposition parties also intensified as they sought for ways out of the mounting socio-political crisis.

After a short merger (1964) the Praja Socialist Party (PSP) and the Socialist Party each went their separate way (1965). A group headed by N. G. Gorai and S. N. Dvivedi that had formerly been part of the Praja Socialist Party now broke away from the Samyukta Socialist Party (SSP).

A basic factor underlying the conflict within the leadership of the Samyukta Socialist Party was the divergence in the stands adopted by its various factions with regard to the question of co-operation with the Communists, both in the implementation of mass campaigns and in work inside the legislatures. The Right leaders of the former Praja Socialist Party continued their stand against communism and the Soviet Union, while the other leaders S. M. Joshi, Ram Manohar Lohia and Madhu Limaye were prepared in some degree to co-operate with the communist forces. The Socialists also found themselves in a position weaker than before, after a group of its members resigned from the party to join the Congress. They were led by the founder of the Praja Socialist Party, Asoka Mehta, who assumed the post of Planning Minister in the Government of India.

After this split in the Samyukta Socialist Party the trade union centre Hind Mazdur Panchayat was still under its influence; however, the larger trade-union centre Hind Mazdur Sabha secured greater independence, since the various groupings in its leadership were under the influence of the SSP, the Praja Socialist Party and also other political forces.



## The Situation in the Communist Movement

At the end of 1963 after something of a drop in the tension, stemming from the Sino-Indian border conflict, the Communist Party began once more to organise mass-scale action of the working people in defence of their rights.

In December 1963, after a ten-year break, the leadership of the Communist Party called a meeting of communist activists within the trade-union movement, at which the tasks before the unions were discussed in connection with the changes that had taken place in the years since Independence.

The meeting adopted a resolution concerning the growing national campaign of mass action calling for lower prices and taxes, higher wages, the nationalisation of the banks and some branches of industry.

In June 1964 a National Conference of blue- and white-collar workers from enterprises in the state sector was convened on the initiative of the CPI. It emerged clearly at the conference that the task before the trade unions was to campaign both for immediate economic objectives and also to defend the democratic rights of the workers employed in the state sector, and call for the expansion and efficient functioning of the enterprises in the state sector.

At the end of 1963 the CPI had also begun to rally mass campaigns of the working people. In August 1963 the Communists took part in the *bandh* (a general strike affecting industrial enterprises, offices and commercial establishments) which was arranged by the Socialist Party in Bombay.

The first mass campaign organised by the CPI was the collection of signatures throughout the country for a "Great Petition", and this was followed by the "Great March" on September 13, 1963, in Delhi involving representatives from all states, where the petition was submitted to the Parliament. In the petition support was voiced for the policy of non-alignment, state economic planning and defence effort, and demands were put forward for the abolition of the system of compulsory loans, for control over gold reserves, for lower prices and rates of taxation, for the nationalisation of the banks, the oil industry and foreign trade.

These demands were also supported by progressive elements in the National Congress and the Left opposition parties. Over 10,200,000 signatures for the "Great Petition" were collected, a number which approximately corresponded to the number of voters, who had supported CPI candidates at the 1962 election. More than 200,000 people from all over the country had taken part in the "Great March".

In December 1962 the All-India Trade Union Congress convened a nation-wide conference at which a resolution was adopted calling for mass action on the part of the working people during 1964.

The leaders of the CPI and the AITUC planned three stages of action. For the first stage a three-day hunger strike by trade-union workers throughout the country was organised on February 20, 1964; the second stage involved fifteen-minute demonstrations at the gates of factories on March 7, in which tens of thousands of workers participated; the third stage took place in July and August assuming the form of one-day *bandhs* in individual states and a national civil disobedience campaign (*satyagraha*) in August.

The one-day *bandhs* (general strikes and protest rallies) were organised in Kerala, Gujarat (mainly in the capital of that state Ahmadabad under the leadership of the CPI and two local mass organisations), Maharashtra (where action was centred in Bombay supported by the Left opposition parties and involving three million people) and Uttar Pradesh (where action was centred in Cawnpore).

Between August 24 and 28 a nation-wide civil disobedience campaign was staged—a "great *satyagraha*"—while picket lines and demonstrations were organised in front of government offices, banks, stock exchanges and markets. Eighty thousand people took part in this campaign, the largest of its kind since Independence; twenty-five thousand of them were arrested on the spot for picketing.

The "All-India *bandh*" scheduled for September 25 was dropped by the party because it had not succeeded in securing the support of the other main trade-union associations, in particular the Hind Mazdoor Sabha.

This use by the Communists and other Left forces of traditional forms of struggle familiar to the Indian people and which had become popular back in colonial times (the *hartal* and *satyagraha*) helped them gain influence among the masses and this new focus of action also promoted the unity of the Left opposition.

At the end of 1964 a strike movement began to spread throughout the country. In 1965 representatives of the Left trade unions set up action committees at state and national level to organise the strike movement. The All-India Action Committee submitted to the government a Charter of demands drawn up by the working people, in which economic and political issues were raised. On September 21, 1965 it was decided to hold a "Day of National Action" in support of the Charter. However this did not take place because of the Indo-Pakistani conflict which broke out that same month.

The growth of the mass movement, and the increasing influence enjoyed by the Communist Party were impeded by the deepening rift within the communist movement. This process that had begun in the autumn of 1962 culminated in October 1964 in the resignation from the leadership of a group of prominent Party members, who proceeded to hold a conference of a parallel Communist Party in Calcutta, which adopted a different programme and elected a Central Committee headed by General Secretary, P. Sundaryya. This party came to be known as the CPI (Marxists).

After accusing the leadership of the CPI of revisionism the



leaders of the new party launched an ideological campaign aimed at undermining the CPI's influence in the mass organisations of the workers, peasants and intellectuals. This movement reduced the scope for united action by the Left opposition forces both at state and national level.

In December 1964 the CPI held its 7th Congress in Bombay at which the political situation in the country as well as the position in the party since the split in the communist movement were analysed in detail. In the new programme adopted in Bombay it was decided that the party should work towards the creation of a national-democratic front. Painstaking work now began on surmounting the unfortunate consequences of the split in the mass organisations of the working people.

### The Indo-Pakistani Conflict

By the beginning of 1965 Indo-Pakistani relations were extremely tense. Once more a series of hostile recriminations over the Kashmir issue started up. The reactionary government of Pakistan headed by Ayub Khan encouraged anti-Indian chauvinist attitudes. In April 1965 there was a border incident in the Rann of Kutch and then in August unrest broke out in Kashmir provoked by groups linked with the extremist circles in Pakistan. Indian troops in Kashmir were drawn into actions against Pakistani units. Skirmishes continued throughout August and on September 6 armed clashes began on the Punjab border.

The Soviet Union made a decisive contribution to the termination of this conflict; as early as August 1965 it had put forward a peace plan. In a special message to the Indian and Pakistani heads of government the Chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers, A. N. Kosygin, offered his good offices in settling this conflict. The proposal was accepted and a conference was held in Tashkent (January 3-10, 1966) attended by A. N. Kosygin, Lal Bahadur Shastri and Ayub Khan. As a result of this conference, the Tashkent Declaration was signed, specifying the conditions for military and political regulation of the conflict and opening the way towards a normalisation of relations between the two countries.

News that this Declaration had been signed was joyfully welcomed by all friends of peace not only in the Indian subcontinent but also throughout the rest of the world. However, the rejoicing was overshadowed by information to the effect that soon after the signing Mr. Shastri had died in Tashkent. The death of the Indian Prime Minister sparked off new complications in the internal political arena of India.

The new tension was linked with the major economic difficulties resulting from the 1965-1966 drought, stepped-up offensive by powerful capitalist concerns both foreign and home-based, which in its turn was accelerated by the consequences of the Indo-Pakistani conflict.

### The Economic Crisis of the Mid-1960s

By the mid-1960s the profound contradictions inherent in the country's capitalist development were coming more and more to the fore: low rates of accumulation, the narrow home market, the incompleteness of the industrial revolution, the shortage of investment capital, the low level of capitalist development in agriculture, the major role still played by merchant and usurious capital, the economy's far-reaching dependence on foreign capital, the increasingly evident weaknesses of state capitalism (limited influence, inefficiency, bureaucracy, etc.), the limited and contradictory nature of the planning, the problems of inadequate financing, increasing socio-political contradictions, etc. The whole of the country's economy was experiencing major difficulties not only because of the growing contradictions within the capitalist sector, but also because of the growing contradictions and gulf between the developing capitalist sector and the pre-capitalist sectors of the economy, which were largely stagnant at that time. This latter section of the economy accounted for two-thirds of the gross domestic product and it was holding back the development of capitalism in India. All these contradictions, coupled with the mounting crisis in agricultural production, aggravated by the droughts of 1965-1967, meant that the economy in the mid-1960s entered a long and serious decline, when rates of development were dropping. Substantial rises in taxes and prices and inflation combined with food shortages meant a serious drop in the living standards of the working people, who were suffering not merely from capitalist exploitation but also from various forms of pre-capitalist exploitation, increased social and economic inequalities and caused increasing discontent with Congress rule, particularly among the urban population.

In a situation fraught with mounting economic problems, and under pressure from conservative forces who could bring their influence to bear not merely on the government but also on the Congress leadership, government policy from late 1963 onwards was moving away from strict and thorough controls to increasing stimulation of the market mechanism, private enterprise and private initiative. This was reflected in the reduced attention paid to economic planning, the abolition or relaxation of controls over the issue of securities, over the licensing of industrial enterprises and over prices and distribution, in the liberalisation of import legisla-



tion and the extension of financial privileges enjoyed by private entrepreneurs. Viewed as a whole these measures resulted in a redistribution of national resources in the interests of the private sector.

#### **Internal Political Developments 1966-1969. The Fourth General Elections of 1967**

The death of Lal Bahadur Shastri led to a new wave of contradictions in the leadership of the ruling party. For the first time in the history of the National Congress Party two candidates were nominated for the post of Prime Minister: Mrs. Indira Gandhi, Nehru's daughter, supported by the Centrist and Left factions, and Morarji Desai supported by the Right faction. After a fierce struggle within the Congress parliamentary party Mrs. Indira Gandhi won the support of the majority. On the eve of the next general election in 1967 the position within the party and its political standing were most complex. In 1965-1966 there had been a split in a number of Congress organisations at state level. New local parties consisting of groupings and leaders that had left the Congress now emerged as political phenomena of some considerable importance in West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Rajasthan, Kerala and Mysore. After the elections were over, at varying times groups of newly elected legislators deserted the National Congress factions in the state legislatures, in Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, and Madhya Pradesh, a development which resulted in the fall of the Congress governments in those states.

In May 1967 a majority of local parties consisting of former Congressists formed a new All-India party known as Bharatiya Kranti Dal (Indian Revolutionary Party), in the meantime retaining their autonomy and the names of the state parties that had been the founders of the new one.

Changes were also at work in the ranks of the Samyukta Socialist Party (SSP). The programme of concrete socio-economic changes, which it had adopted in 1966, coincided in the main with such programmes elaborated by the CPI and the parallel communist party. The SSP announced that its ultimate aim was to establish public ownership of the means of production and that it advocated class struggle. Yet at the same time nationalism also played an important part in the propaganda work and policies of the SSP. The political stand adopted by many SSP leaders bore the stamp of adventurism. It was precisely the leader and ideologue of the SSP, the late R.M. Lohia who in the early 1960s put forward the idea that agreements should be reached between all opposition parties prior to the elections regardless of their political leanings, so as to defeat the National Congress. In the election campaign of 1967 the SSP tried to arrange such an agreement with the parties of both the Right and the Left.

The results of the general election of 1967 showed to what an extent the political parties' influence over the voters had changed, and also how their political weight in Parliament had changed since the 1962 election. The position now enjoyed by the National Congress revealed the most conspicuous change.

The National Congress won 40 per cent of the votes at the 1967 election and 54 per cent of the seats in Parliament's Lok Sabha as against 45 per cent of the votes and 73 per cent of the seats in 1962. Thus it had lost five per cent of the votes and close on 19 per cent of the seats it had had before.

However, the influence of the National Congress among the voters suffered a far less decline than that reflected in the voting figures. This was to a large extent the result of the agreements reached among the opposition parties and also to the new-found preference shown by many voters for the larger opposition parties. Nevertheless the system of majority representation was such as to allow Congress to gain a far greater share of the seats in the Parliament (54 per cent) and in the state legislatures (50 per cent) than its share of the actual votes (40 per cent).

This meant that after the 1967 election and in particular after the splits that took place immediately after it in the Congress organisations in a number of states the National Congress had lost its position as the ruling party in nine of the 17 states. The total population of these nine states was no less than three-fifths of the entire population of the country.

In these states coalition governments were set up consisting of the parties opposed to the National Congress. In the states of Kerala and West Bengal, whose total population came to approximately sixty million, coalition governments of the Left and democratic parties were set up that were dominated by Communists, especially by members of the newly formed parallel CPI (Marxists), which led the government in Kerala and was the main group in the government coalition in West Bengal. In Bihar, the Punjab and Uttar Pradesh, the CPI and some parties of the Right (in particular representatives of the Jan Sangh) formed the new state coalition governments. In Bihar it was the parties of the Left that dominated the coalition (in particular the SSP), in Uttar Pradesh the parties of the Right (in particular the Jan Sangh). In the Punjab the main coalition party was the local Akali Dal. In Madras the government was formed from the local party Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK). In two states the coalition governments consisted of representatives of parties of the Right: the Swatantra Party in Orissa and the Jan Sangh Party in Madhya Pradesh, both working in conjunction with groups that had broken away from the National Congress. In the state of Haryana the government was formed from a group that had broken away from the National Congress and that was relying on Right-wing support, now that the parties of the Right had considerable support there. It was revealing to note that in



addition to Haryana, five other states of the nine now had coalition governments consisting of representatives from parties other than the Congress (West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, the Punjab and Madhya Pradesh), in which leaders of groups that had broken away from the National Congress became chief ministers.

The elections showed that the Congress monopoly of political power had been seriously undermined. The one-party system that had been used to further the interests of the exploiting classes had now given way to a two-party or multi-party system.

During 1967 and 1968 the Right-wing forces in the party headed by the "Syndicate" group attempted to block efforts to pursue the Nehru course in foreign and domestic policies and to undermine the personal authority of Mrs. Indira Gandhi.

In the summer of 1969 in an attempt to restore the party's falling prestige Mrs. Indira Gandhi nationalised fourteen of the leading private banks, after which the Minister of Finance, Morarji Desai, resigned. In the elections in August 1969 for a new President of India to replace the late Zakir Hussain, the Left-Centrist grouping within the National Congress emerged victorious with their candidate V. V. Giri, a veteran of the trade-union movement. A virtual split in the Congress party at the Centre now took place culminating in the autumn of 1969 with the formation of two parallel Congress organisations right across the country.

Anxious to consolidate the success scored in the presidential election, Indira Gandhi followed the nationalisation of the banks with a number of other progressive socio-economic measures.

In December 1969 the Monopolies and Restrictive Practices Act was passed placing limits on certain commercial practices, which came into force on June 1, 1970. This Act specified that the creation, merger or major extension of enterprises dominating a branch of industry and possessing assets of more than ten million rupees, and any enterprises forming associations with assets of over two hundred million rupees required official permission to do so. The new Act also provided for the creation of a permanent Commission to control the monopolies and commercial dealings, which when necessary was to make recommendations to the government on such questions, and also to review cases of monopolist practices in trading and prohibit those that were contrary to the public interest.

In February 1970 the government declared its new policy aimed at defining the spheres of state-controlled enterprise, large-scale private companies, small-scale industries and other private undertakings. The sphere of the state sector was defined in the main as in the Industrial Policy Resolution of 1956, with due account of the changes that had taken place in the country in the intervening years.

In February 1970 it was announced that the allocations for the 4th five-year plan (1969/70-1973/74) would be reviewed. Under the

reviewed project, investment in the state sector was increased from 122,500 million rupees to 136,000 million and thus it was allocated 60 per cent instead of 55 per cent laid down in the original figures: accordingly the share of investment allocated to the private sector was cut from 45 per cent to 40 per cent by reducing it from 100,000 million rupees to 89,800 million. In the same month a Commission to investigate accusations against the Birla House and other monopoly groups was set up.

In March of the same year the government passed a resolution providing for increased state control over the import of thirty-eight types of goods (as opposed to the 22 listed before). In August 1970 the import of cotton was also taken over by the state.

In April the government reduced prices of seventeen vital types of drugs (the reductions varied from 10 to 70 per cent). In the same month it was announced that the government would draw more workers into the administration of the country's enterprises by appointing one of the directors from candidates put forward from the ranks of blue- and white-collar workers.

In 1970 resolutions were also passed that partially satisfied the demands put forward by the workers for increased wages in the sugar and engineering industries, the electricity industry, and also by the port and road transport workers. Wage agreements were also signed with blue- and white-collar workers in the iron and steel industry, the banks and the insurance companies.

In January 1971 the central government announced a broad programme aimed at increasing employment in the rural areas. This programme which came into force in April 1971 was to cover the three remaining years of the 4th five-year plan. It provided for projects that would demand large manpower resources and was aimed at achieving the following main objectives: 1) creating in each district new jobs for a hundred people for ten months of the year at an average monthly wage of 100 rupees (preference being given to those families which at the time in question did not have a single wage-earner among its adult members); 2) promoting the implementation of local programmes for economic development by creating such long-term assets as roads, small-scale irrigation, land amelioration schemes, etc. The central government was to meet the cost of this programme, that came to five hundred million rupees, itself.

## CONSOLIDATION OF THE LEFT FORCES

### Mounting Mass Struggle

The important progressive socio-economic measures carried through by Indira Gandhi's Government, during 1969 and 1970, indicated the shift to the Left in the balance of political forces in



India at that time. These changes were first and foremost attributable to the mass struggle of the working-people campaigning for general democratic change.

The split in the Communist movement had a negative effect on the mass movement; however, in the second half of the 1960s the struggle of the working class continued to gain ground. Against a background of a general move towards increased unity in the labour movement representatives of the main trade-union centres drew up a new programme for their common struggle. The document laying down this new programme soon gained popular support and on May 1, 1969, it was submitted to the Parliament with five million signatures as a petition. However, the split within the AITUC was a setback for unity within the labour movement as was indeed the formation of another trade-union centre—the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) supported by the CPI (Marxists).

The split in the Communist movement also affected the work of the peasant organisations. Although the Kisan Sabha renewed its activity in 1965-1966 after a four or five year break, parallel organisations had in the mean time been set up in a number of states. The split was officially acknowledged in early 1968 when two All-India peasant unions replaced the original ones. The most active part in this recent struggle was played by the poor peasants, in particular tenant farmers and share-croppers in West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Tamilnad. In West Bengal the peasants resorted to armed action led by the extremists. This movement of the Naxalites (Left extremists) began to spread to other parts of the country (in particular Andhra Pradesh and Punjab). Left extremists left the CPI (Marxists) and in May 1969 set up their party, the third Communist Party (Marxist-Leninists).

The agricultural workers also started campaigning for their rights at this time and in 1968 the All-India Khet Mazdur Union was set up with the backing of the CPI. In 1969-1970 the CPI, Kisan Sabha and the Khet Mazdur Union staged a mass movement for the seizure of land by force.

Violence including acts of individual terror became more and more widespread as a method of political struggle. It was against this background that the call for political stability was coming to be voiced in ever wider circles of society. Taking into account the public mood at this time and in view of the growing support for the ruling Congress Party, the leaders of this party decided to hold early elections.

The official Congress Party launched a broad propaganda campaign stressing the measures of socio-economic change already implemented and those scheduled for the future. In addition to numerous speeches by the leaders of the ruling party and the government at mass rallies and meetings all over the country the All-India Congress Committee of the National Congress published special propaganda pamphlets devoted to the socio-economic policy

of the ruling party, in particular to the Bombay resolution on the economic policy and subsequent measures (published in July 1970) and measures undertaken after the nationalisation of banks (published in September 1970). In practice long before the elections had been announced the ruling party had begun its large-scale election campaign. The party's election manifesto mainly repeated the promises that had been outlined in the above-mentioned documents and publications. The actual reason for calling elections was declared to be the need to secure a firm parliamentary majority for the implementation of the promised socio-economic measures.

### The General Elections of 1971 and 1972

The progressive shift in the socio-economic policy of the ruling party and the government and the broad publicity given to these changes and the promises made in connection with the country's future development played a major part in the success of the ruling Congress Party at the mid-term election held in 1971. This change in official policy can to a large extent be attributed to the successes scored by the Left parties at the 1967 and 1969 elections.

Taking up slogans closely resembling those which had been put forward earlier by the parties of the Left, the ruling Congress Party won the support of large sections of the electorate that had formerly voted for the parties of the Left through its promises of wide-ranging social changes and various measures in connection with the implementation of those promises. On the other hand by accusing the Congress (O) Party of being the main force standing in the way of these progressive changes in the socio-economic sphere the ruling party was able to win over the bulk of those voters, who had formerly supported the united National Congress.

After these elections to the Parliament held in March 1971 the ruling party once more enjoyed an absolute two-third majority which was essential for the introduction of amendments to the Constitution.

During 1971 the National Congress government, that now enjoyed a secure parliamentary majority and the support of the Left forces, continued to implement its programme of progressive economic change. Two amendments were made to the Constitution giving the Parliament the right to pass legislative acts limiting the right to private property without paying compensation. The Parliament asserted its sovereignty in the sphere of economic and social legislation and thereby forestalled attempts by the reactionary majority in the Supreme Court to block the implementation of the governmental decision to nationalise the banks and do away with the privileges enjoyed by the former rulers of the princely states. At the end of the year the Parliament resolved to put an



end to the payment of pensions to the former rulers, which resulted in an economy of fifty million rupees a year and also foiled attempts by feudal and reactionary elements to undermine the country's political stability.

An important progressive measure introduced at this time was the passing of a law enabling the government to establish control over privately owned enterprises. The Government of Indira Gandhi assumed control over 64 Indian and 42 foreign insurance companies, 214 coal mines and other enterprises. In some states a number of enterprises of the light and food industries were also placed under state control.

The beginning of a new round of agrarian reforms was also announced; these would include a lower "ceiling" for private holdings and also efforts to establish greater state control over various spheres of the Indian economy. After these announcements the popularity of the ruling Congress Party was enhanced still further.

In elections to the state legislatures in 1972 the ruling Congress Party won 48 per cent of the votes as against the 43.6 per cent gained at the elections to the central Parliament in the preceding year. In 1967 the Congress Party (prior to the split) had won 42.7 per cent of the votes in the state legislatures. This meant that there was no denying the enhanced prestige of the ruling Congress Party under Indira Gandhi. As a result the Congress was able to consolidate its position considerably in the state legislatures in which it won about 76 per cent of the seats. The "old" Congress Party at the 1967 election had won less than 50 per cent of the votes in the state legislatures.

The ruling Congress Party formed a government in 15 out of the 21 states (elections had not been held in five states).

It is worth noting that in eleven of the sixteen state legislatures the ruling Congress Party gained two-thirds of the seats which meant that it was in a still better position for securing a majority in the upper chamber of the Parliament (Rajya Sabha) at the election in April 1972.

However, in most of the states the share of the votes secured by the Congress in 1972 was less than those won at the parliamentary election of 1971. This can be explained by the fact that in the election campaign of 1972 many local "issues" were raised and there were far more "shady" features to be brought to light concerning the activities of the Congress organisations at state level.

The elections showed a marked decline in the parliamentary position of the main parties of the Right (a loss of seats in the state legislatures); however the decline in their mass following was far less marked.

As a result of the election to the state legislatures in 1972 the parties of the Left retained their overall positions. The CPI won 4.2 per cent of the votes (as against 4.1 per cent in 1967 and 4.9 per cent in 1971). Reference should be made here to the considerable rise in the influence of the CPI in West Bengal (7.4 per cent in 1967 and 13 per cent of the votes in 1972). The CPI reached an agreement with the

ruling Congress Party on the adjustment of seats in West Bengal, Bihar, the Punjab, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Mysore (i.e., in six of the sixteen states, including Delhi) which enabled it to strengthen considerably its position in the legislatures of those states.

The CPI (Marxists) gained a total of 4.6 per cent of the votes as against 4.9 per cent in 1971 and 4 per cent in 1967. However the splitting tactics pursued by its leaders brought about a crushing defeat for their party in West Bengal and to a marked drop in its position in the State Legislative Assembly; it now had 34 members there as against the 128 it had before the election. This meant that the party's influence has been substantially weakened at national level.

The Socialists' overall position was now somewhat weaker than before as regards their influence among the masses (they had secured 4.6 per cent of the votes as compared to 5.1 per cent in 1967), and there had been a sharp drop in the number of seats they had won in the state legislatures (58 as against the previous 117). It was only in Bihar that the Socialists remained the main opposition party (16 per cent).

The implementation of progressive socio-economic reforms by Indira Gandhi's government reflected the definite shift towards the Left in the balance of political forces in India that was underway by this time. In the final analysis these changes in the internal political situation could be attributed to the pressure from the working people in their mass struggle.

The growing influence of the Left-Centrist grouping within the Congress leadership affected the party's attitude and also the attitudes taken by the mass organisations supporting it, to the Left opposition, in particular the CPI. Changes also took place within the leadership of the INTUC, which started collaborating with the AITUC and other trade-union centres, more consistently than before. In May 1971 an All-India trade-union conference was held in Delhi, attended by delegates from all of the major national trade-union centres and the independent All-India national trade-union federations. The conference adopted a detailed "Joint Action Charter" which laid down a broad programme for the struggle to uphold the working people's economic rights.

The drive to bring about the unity of all Left and democratic forces was emphasised once again at the 9th Congress of the Communist Party held in October 1971 in Cochin. The congress drew up flexible tactics combining co-operation with the Left both outside and inside the National Congress with the stepping-up of the mass campaign to uphold the interests of the working people.

After the election the National Congress formed governments in most of the states; however, the position within the party was now complicated by the return to its ranks of many Right-wing elements. Consolidation of the Right wing in the National Congress exacerbated



inter-party struggle and undermined the stability of the Congress governments in certain states, thus impeding the further implementation of progressive economic measures that had been planned by the All-India Congress Committee in October 1972. All these developments took place as the country's economic position was deteriorating (the growth rate for national income continued to fall between 1969 and 1972) and social tension was mounting. Tasks crucial for the consolidation of the recent shift towards the Left in Indian politics were becoming more and more difficult to carry out.

#### **The Foreign Policy of Indira Gandhi's Government in 1970-1972. Indo-Pakistani Conflict in 1971**

After the split in the Indian National Congress in 1969 those forces within the ruling party, which had been pressing the Indian Government to reorientate its hitherto neutralist foreign policy along a pro-Western, and in particular a pro-United States course, enjoyed considerably less influence. This meant that Indira Gandhi's Government was in a position to uphold the fundamental principles of foreign policy elaborated when Nehru had still been at the country's helm, and also to implement measures aimed at promoting closer political, economic and cultural co-operation with the USSR and the other socialist countries.

In order to consolidate India's position in the Third World, her diplomatic initiatives, as in the years 1967-1969, were aimed at strengthening bilateral relations with the countries of Asia and Africa. Another important objective of Indian foreign policy was to consolidate and expand relations with the advanced capitalist countries; this was made necessary first and foremost by the requirements of the country's economic and socio-cultural development.

As before, India's major problems in the sphere of foreign policy were those concerning relations with Pakistan and the People's Republic of China. The long-drawn-out conflict between India and Pakistan on the one hand and India and China on the other continued to influence relations between India and other nations, particularly the Great Powers.

Tension in relations with Pakistan, which had been blatantly obvious at the conference of Moslem countries held in Rabat in the summer of 1970, had been growing steadily since the end of 1970 as contradictions in the internal situation in Pakistan increased.

The national liberation movement in East Pakistan began gaining ground; its growing influence culminated in a victory at the first general election (December 1970) in Pakistan's history for the Bengali national party the Awami League (People's League) and also for forces opposed to Yahya Khan's military regime in West Pakistan; the results of the election were then rejected out of hand by the ruling

circles in West Pakistan; this move was then followed by the suppression by force of Bengali national organisations, by the dispersal of legislative bodies in East Pakistan and the arrest on March 26, 1971, of the Bengali national leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman; this chain of events then culminated in large-scale armed action by the army of West Pakistan against guerilla detachments and their Bengali civilian supporters. The mass destruction and killings perpetrated during the next eight months by government troops led many Bengali refugees to flee to India: by the end of 1971 the number of these refugees had reached ten million.

The deployment and feeding of this flood of refugees placed a heavy burden on the Indian economy. The moral support which had been shown the Bengali national movement by India sparked off a ferocious anti-India propaganda campaign in Pakistan, that was encouraged by the military regime. This in turn made relations between India and Pakistan even worse than before. The situation deteriorated still further, when the Chinese Government openly declared its support for the ruling clique in Pakistan, and the United States also made clear its general approval of Pakistan's policy.

The firm and consistent stand adopted by the Soviet Union in this situation played an important role in the subsequent course of events: the USSR called unequivocally for an end to all bloodshed and a peaceful settlement of all differences. The logic of events in relation both to Indian foreign policy and domestic politics led the country towards a course of closer co-operation with the Soviet Union. The signing of a Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Co-operation by India and the Soviet Union on August 9, 1971, not only placed relations between the two countries on a new, higher footing, but also served to consolidate India's position in the international arena.

Despite efforts to avert any further escalation of tension in the Indian subcontinent, armed conflict broke out between India and Pakistan on December 3, 1971. Fourteen days of military operation along a wide front ended in the capitulation of the Pakistani armed forces and a cease-fire on December 17, called for on India's initiative.

Pakistan's defeat and the collapse of its military regime, followed by the formation of the People's Republic of Bangladesh on the one hand, and India's victory on the other gave rise to significant changes in the balance of power in South Asia and in the situation within India itself. These factors served greatly to enhance the prestige of Indira Gandhi and that of the National Congress which emerged victorious in the provincial elections of 1972.

The resolution of problems stemming from the consequences of the Indo-Pakistani conflict loomed large in Indian foreign policy during 1972. In March 1972 India concluded with Bangladesh (which it had officially recognised as early as December 6, 1971) a Treaty of Friendship and Co-operation and rendered economic aid. In March 1972 Indian troops were withdrawn from Bangladesh.



**INDIA IN THE MID-SEVENTIES:  
DEEPENING CONTRADICTIONS IN INTERNAL  
DEVELOPMENT (1973-1977)**

On July 3, 1972, after talks in Simla (India) between Indira Gandhi and Bhutto, the new president of Pakistan, an agreement was drawn up between the two countries providing a basis for future regulation of controversial issues by peaceful means. In keeping with this agreement a number of issues that had arisen out of the armed conflict (such as demarcation of spheres of control in Kashmir, the withdrawal of troops and the exchange of prisoners of war; etc.) had been resolved in the main by the end of 1972.

The pro-Pakistani stance adopted by the United States Government during the war and the freezing of American aid led to a sharp deterioration in relations between India and the USA. At the same time India started to concentrate her attention on developing ties with states representing progressive forces in world politics. This was reflected in India's recognition of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the German Democratic Republic and the Indian Government's official support for the proposals put forward by the Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Vietnam. India sharply criticised American policy in Vietnam, the stand taken by the Saigon regime and also Israeli aggression against the Arab countries.

The Soviet-Indian treaty of 1971 furthered the successful advance of political, economic and cultural co-operation between the two countries. In 1972 extensive Soviet-Indian agreements providing for scientific and technical collaboration were signed.

The general move towards a reduction of international tension that had begun in 1972 also left its mark on Indian foreign policy.

L. I. Brezhnev, General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee, assessed the significance of Soviet-Indian friendship and India's place in the context of international relations in the following terms:

"India undoubtedly plays a prominent part in shaping the destinies of Asia. We have a Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Co-operation with that country. We regard this Treaty as a reliable basis for lasting good and friendly relations. India has made a large and valuable contribution to world politics, and its role, we are convinced, will continue to grow. Soviet-Indian friendship is strengthening from year to year, and there can be no doubt that the future will be marked by fresh steps in this direction for the good of both our countries and the cause of universal peace."\*

The support given by the majority of voters to the Indian National Congress, up for elections in 1971 and 1972 with a programme of social and economic transformations, the agreements arrived at between the Congress and the Communist Party of India (CPI) in the course of the elections, the collaboration in individual spheres between the Communists and the Left-Centrist wing of the ruling party all opened up promising perspectives for a further swing to the Left in the country's political life. However, the implementation of the Left-Centrist programme advanced by Indira Gandhi during the election campaign was complicated by the deepening contradictions in India's bourgeois development. The Congress' victory in the 1971 and 1972 elections did not solve the growing social and political crisis in the country, but opened a new stage in the struggle to preserve the positive aspects of the Nehru line.

**ECONOMIC SITUATION IN THE MID-SEVENTIES**

The contradictions inherent in India's development along a bourgeois course were manifested primarily in the economic difficulties experienced by the country.

Since attaining independence India had scored definite achievements in its economic development. The overall volume of industrial production had increased more than four-fold by the mid-seventies. New branches of the mining and processing industries, including metallurgy and heavy engineering, were created in the state and private sectors. The country's power base had strengthened: the output of coal rose 2.3 times, of oil, over 25 times, of petrochemical products, 85 times, of electrical energy, 10 times. The beginnings of mechanisation and chemicalisation in the capitalist sector of agriculture indicated that the industrial revolution in India had entered a new phase.

However, against this background of substantial positive changes in the restructuring of the economic system inherited from colonialism, difficulties in development along a capitalist course began to

\* Pravda, September 25, 1973.



manifest themselves more and more clearly starting in the mid-sixties. This was particularly evident in the lowered rates of economic growth. Whereas during the first five-year plan period the average yearly increase in industrial output amounted to 6.5 per cent, during the second, to 7.3 per cent and during the third, to 7.8 per cent, during the fourth five-year plan period (1969/70-1973/74) the corresponding figure was only 3.8 per cent (over the period from 1937 to 1946 it had been 0.6 per cent), although the plan provided for a growth of 8 to 10 per cent a year. In the first half of the seventies the growth rates of industrial production continued to fall, to 3.6 per cent in 1971, 2.9 per cent in 1972, and 2.5 per cent in 1973. In 1974 and 1975 industrial growth practically reached the zero mark.

The most important reason for the slow-down in the country's economic development was the continuing lag of agriculture. Since Independence a definite development (both of an extensive and intensive character) had occurred in agriculture: the gross produce more than doubled, as did the irrigated area, while the total cultivated area increased by 30 per cent and the average crop yield, by 40 per cent. But the basis for the growth of agricultural production during the period of the "green revolution", which started in the mid-sixties, remained extremely narrow and involved no more than 20 per cent of all cultivated land, basically the holdings of rich peasants and landlords who at the beginning of the seventies owned no less than half of the total of operated land in the country. In most holdings owned by rich peasants and landlords, farming was characteristically carried out on the traditional agro-technological basis. By the mid-seventies the "green revolution" had affected only the most developed regions of the North-West of India (in the states of the Punjab, Haryana and Western Uttar Pradesh) and individual districts in the country's western and southern states.

Small-scale and marginal holdings of semi-proletarians made up the vast majority (about 70 per cent) of peasant farms. Agricultural production was stagnant on nearly half of the total of cultivated area, and the owners of these uneconomic holdings were in various stages of pauperisation and proletarianisation.

The growth rates achieved by India in agricultural and industrial production barely covered the growth in population (an average 2.5 per cent annually). This is why the mean per capita income increased by only 1.5 per cent a year over the period from 1950 to 1971, while from 1972 to 1975 it steadily decreased, rising again only in 1976-1977.

According to official data, at the start of the seventies 40 per cent of the rural and 50 per cent of the urban population lived below the "poverty line", i.e. spent no more than 20 rupees a month (in 1961 prices) on personal needs. The persistence of this huge reservoir of poverty was combined with a further and, to quote the Indian press, "scandalous" increase in inequality of means and a growth in the personal consumption of the top layers of the propertied classes. These contrasts caused by bourgeois development were perhaps

nowhere so evident as in the major Indian urban agglomerations, especially in Bombay, where the spread of the slum areas has gone hand in hand with the construction of luxurious hotels and high-rise apartment buildings for the *nouveaux riches*.

The extremely low purchasing power of the majority of the Indian population, the limited possibilities for technologically restructuring the main branches of the Indian economy and the slow rate at which this is being effected, the full transition to the factory stage in the extracting and processing industries still not having been completed, and the low competitive value of a considerable portion of Indian industrial goods on the world market have all resulted in a very narrow market for Indian industry. Considerable underutilisation of industrial capacities has become a characteristic phenomenon in the leading branches of the country's industry.

Crisis phenomena have aggravated the problem of the Indian economy's disproportional and non-integrated development. The contradictions among various strata and groups of the Indian bourgeoisie have also intensified.

By the mid-seventies the state sector's leading role in India's industrialisation had been fully determined. The public share of investments in economic development rose from 3 per cent in 1950/51 to 48 per cent in 1971/72. The growth of capital investments in the state sector outstripped that in the private sector. At the beginning of the seventies gross capital investments in enterprises in the state sector (including the infra-structure) were estimated to be 220,000 million rupees, while those in the private sector came to 130,000 million rupees.

In a few branches of production the state sector began to play a decisive role. Eighty-five per cent of pig iron and 48 per cent of steel, 95 per cent of oil and oil products, 80 per cent of electrical energy, 50 per cent of chemical fertilisers came from state-owned enterprises.

The state's role is also prominent in the infra-structure: in owns the country's railroads and highways, seaports, air transport, communications, and major irrigation and power supply facilities.

The state sector in the sphere of circulation has come to occupy a no less leading position: its share of bank deposits is 87 per cent, of import trade, 70 per cent and of export trade, 30 per cent.

But the state sector has not yet assumed the major role in the national economy. Its share of production has reached approximately 30 per cent in the processing industry, but accounts for only 16 per cent of the gross national product. In the early seventies the state sector was involved in only 8 per cent of industrial and 0.2 per cent of agricultural production.

The continuously increasing role of the state sector as well as various forms of state regulation in the country's economic development aroused a growing wave of criticisms of the state capitalism on the part of private capitalist entrepreneurs. This can be explained not only by short-term considerations, caused by economic fluctuations



and competition on raw materials, capital and finished products markets, but also by apprehensions that the state sector might in the future become the economic base for a shift in the direction of non-capitalist development. At the same time the national bourgeoisie had a generally dualistic attitude toward the state sector and state capitalism. Supported by the state sector and making use of the state's regulatory economic mechanism and protectionist policies, the national bourgeoisie was able to significantly increase its range of activities over the thirty years since independence. The state sector did not hinder the process of the concentration and centralisation of capital in India. Measures to limit the activities of monopolies taken in the sixties and early seventies proved ineffective: at the start of the seventies the 133 larger Indian and foreign groups owned up to 75 per cent of all the assets of private joint-stock companies. The assets of the eight largest monopolistic groups amounted to over 1,000 million rupees; among these the Birla group's assets came to 10,600 million rupees, the Tata group's, to 9,700 million and the Mafatlal group's, to 6,900 million rupees.

The growth of small-scale capitalist enterprise continued as the big bourgeoisie and its monopolistic upper crust strengthened their positions. Capitalism's widened scope was evidenced in the creation of hundreds of thousands of small factories and industrial enterprises of the semi-manufacture type. At the same time, small-scale forms of production, in which, as in the past, more workers were employed than at factories and plants, was gradually being crowded out by modern capitalist enterprises. The share of small-scale industries in the national income generated by the industrial sector decreased from 62 per cent in 1950/51 to 34.6 per cent in 1972/73. In various spheres of the economy both the dependence of small on large industry and the contradictions between them increased.

These complex and contradictory processes in the Indian economy had an influence on the country's internal political situation.

#### INTERNAL POLITICAL SITUATION IN 1973-1975

The progressing inflationary processes in the country manifested themselves in an uninterrupted increase of both wholesale and retail prices throughout the whole first half of the seventies. In 1974 alone retail prices rose by 30 per cent. This was a heavy blow for the broad masses of workers, who fought back with a growing number of strikes. The number of working days lost as a result of strikes increased from 15 million man-days in 1971 to 31 million in 1974. The working class's biggest struggles in 1973-1974 were: the national engine-drivers' strike, the forty-day Bombay textile workers' strike, the thirty-three-day jute factory workers' strike in West Bengal, the textile-workers' strikes in Cawnpore and Tamilnad. In the course of their struggle the efforts of various unions, affiliated to different trade

union centres to achieve unity of action, gained in strength. This was promoted by the formation, in May 1972, of the National Trade Unions Council, made up of the All-India Trade Union Congress, the Indian National Trade Union Council and Hind Mazdur Sabha, the country's three largest trade union centres. But the ongoing struggle between the trade unions under the influence of the CPI and the CPI (M) was a serious obstacle to the strengthening of unity within the trade union movement.

Concurrently with the working class's struggle, organisations of the working peasantry and agricultural workers became more active. The two All-India Kisan Sabhas, one under the leadership of the CPI and the other under the CPI (M), organised a series of local and nation-wide campaigns aimed at the implementation of legislation for a "ceiling" on land-ownership, protecting the interests of tenants, lowering the prices of industrial goods bought by peasants, increasing prices for agricultural produce and so on. The grave weaknesses of the peasant organisations were their paucity and their sporadicity in carrying on the mass struggle.

A programme for the peasants was elaborated at the 21st national conference of the Kisan Sabha, which was held in Bhatinda (the Punjab) in September 1973.

During the same years the activities of the All-India Khet Mazdur Union, which basically consisted of agricultural labourers of untouchable castes, also spread. The Union's main lines of action were: higher wages, the struggle for land and agrarian reform and the struggle against caste discrimination of the untouchables. In 1974 the Union held its third conference in Tenali (Andhra Pradesh).

The Communist Party of India in collaboration with trade union, youth and other mass organisations arranged a number of national campaigns in 1972-1974 aimed at defending the workers' economic and political interests.

In October 1972 a national *satyagraha* in favour of a progressive economic policy was held, with picketing of administrative agencies right down to the tahsil level. On March 27, 1973, a "Great March" on Parliament was organised in which over half a million people took part. Fifteen million signatures were collected for a petition demanding the implementation of the progressive social and economic transformations promised during the Congress' pre-election campaign.

In 1973 and 1974 the CPI led mass campaigns against profiteers who had hoarded up food supplies.

In addition to supporting the Congress Party in Parliament and the legislative assemblies and forming a bloc with the ruling party at elections, the CPI's political programme provided for mass action as a means of applying pressure on the Congress to pursue the Left-Centrist shift in its policy which had taken shape in 1967-1972.

An attempt to achieve a union of the Leftist parties was made in the course of the mass struggle. A meeting of representatives of the



CPI, CPI (M), Socialist Party and a few local Leftist parties held in April 1974 resulted in the adoption of a common minimum programme. The growing unity of the forces of the Left contributed to the success in May 1974 of the national railway workers' strike, in which over 1.5 million workers took part.

The 10th Congress of the CPI, which ran from January 27 to February 2, 1975 in Vijayavada (Andhra Pradesh) summed up the results of the party's struggle over the period since the 9th Congress in 1971 and outlined a united front programme of Leftist and democratic forces.

But the further development of the country's internal political situation hindered the consolidation of the Leftist and democratic forces.

On the basis of the people's broad discontent with the worsening economic situation and the Congress' non-fulfilment of its vaunted programme of economic and social transformations, the activity of various nationalistic petty-bourgeois and bourgeois opposition parties intensified.

The aggravation of local nationalistic and particularistic tendencies manifested itself, for example, in the movement (Mulki Tangle) in Andhra Pradesh in 1972-1973, which in fact was aimed in splitting up the state and setting up a new administrative division.

In the elections to the legislative assemblies of Uttar Pradesh, Orissa and three other states and Union territories held at the beginning of 1974, the Congress Party and the CPI once more had the advantage after again reaching agreements on mutual support. But the opposition parties had made sizeable gains.

A large segment of the urban and rural bourgeoisie, dissatisfied with the ruling party's policy of further strengthening the state sector and its unsuccessful attempt at introducing a state monopoly on the grain trade in 1973-1974, began to support the opposition. Misgivings were aroused in certain circles by the government's putting several hundred unprofitable coal mines and textile enterprises under state control.

In this situation the mass movement which began in 1974 in Gujarat and Bihar under the leadership of Jay Prakash Narayan, a well-known public figure, follower and disciple of Gandhi and, in the past, a leading Socialist, represented a grave danger for the Congress Party. This movement called for a "total revolution" aimed at overthrowing the Congress Party's power in the centre and in the states. Mass disorders in Gujarat resulted in the dissolution of the legislative assembly and the imposition of presidential rule. In Bihar the threat to the government was averted by active measures on the part of the state CPI organisation, and later of the Congress Party.

Against the background of the anti-governmental campaign headed by J. P. Narayan and the opposition parties supporting him, the activities of Rightist (RSS, Ananda Marg) and Leftist (Naxalite) extremist organisations and groups intensified. In January 1975, the

Union Minister of Transport L. N. Mishra was killed by terrorists in Bihar and an attempt was made on the life of Supreme Court Justice A. N. Ray in Delhi.

As a result of the mass movement headed by Morarji Desai, who declared a protest hunger strike, the Congress government in Gujarat State was dismissed and presidential rule imposed. The Janata Front (Popular Front), which had been formed on J. P. Narayan's initiative and united the main opposition parties, gained victories in the 1975 elections to the Gujarat Legislative Assembly. The Gujarat elections showed that the united forces of the opposition represented a serious threat to the power of the Congress Party.

In the ruling party itself the movement for an understanding with J. P. Narayan gained adherents. In particular, this was the policy favoured by the group of the "Young Turks"—Chandra Shekhar, Mohan Dharia and other Leftists. They left the Congress Party in 1975.

In June 1975 the country's anti-Congress forces assumed an openly offensive stance against Prime Minister Indira Gandhi after the Allahabad High Court pronounced judgement in the suit of Indira Gandhi's rival in the 1971 elections in the district of Rae Bareilly (Uttar Pradesh), who had accused her of malpractices during the election campaign. The Court decreed that Indira Gandhi was to be deprived of her position as member of Parliament (and automatically of her post as Prime Minister) and forbade her to fill elective positions for six years. Indira Gandhi appealed this judgement in the Supreme Court, which, however, at first pronounced an ambiguous judgement by merely postponing the implementation of the Allahabad Court's decision.

The main opposition parties, including the CPI (M), demanded Indira Gandhi's resignation. It was decided to organise a civil disobedience movement throughout the country, and J. P. Narayan called upon the military and police personnel not to obey government orders.

#### A TURNING-POINT IN INDIA'S INTERNAL POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT: THE EMERGENCY AND THE 1977 ELECTIONS

In response to the opposition's actions, a state of emergency was proclaimed throughout the country on June 26 by the President of India F.-A. Ahmed, who had been elected in August 1974 on the expiration of V. V. Giri's term of office. Over 600 leaders of opposition parties were arrested. In the course of 1975 over 30,000 active members of the opposition and of J. P. Narayan's movement ended up behind bars. On July 4, twenty-six extremist organisations (RSS, Ananda Marg, Naxalites and others) were banned.

In her radio address on July 1, 1975 Indira Gandhi announced a twenty-point programme of progressive social and economic transfor-



mations, which was basically directed at speeding up agrarian reform, improving the position of agricultural workers, doing away with debt bondage and so on.

The blow Gandhi dealt the opposition coincided with an improving economic situation. After the record harvest of 1974-1975 (120 million tons of grain), the government was able to hold back inflation and the consequent increases in wholesale and retail prices from autumn 1974 to spring 1976.

The leaders of the ruling party declared the state of emergency to be a measure directed against threats from the Right. The CPI announced its support of the government's actions and began to actively collaborate with the Congress Party in carrying out the twenty-point programme.

According to official data, by the autumn of 1976 over one million hectares of "surplus land" were taken over and 0.6 million hectares were distributed among peasants with no or little land. About 7 million agricultural workers received housing plots. By the President's Ordinance a moratorium was announced on recovery debts from the rural poor, and bonded labour was declared illegal.

Kisan Sabha and the Khet Mazdur Union conducted *padayatras* (walking tours) in 1975-1976 to ensure the implementation of the twenty-point programme, during which it became clear that the condition of the majority of the rural poor had not been affected by the announced measures.

The negative consequences of the state of emergency began to manifest themselves. Employers did not implement the decision on Industrial Truce, and lockouts and the scaling down of wages became a commonplace occurrence; at the same time strikes were forbidden and the working class' struggle was brutally quashed. A compulsory deposits scheme aroused particular dissatisfaction among factory workers and white-collar employees.

Censorship was introduced and freedom of the press was curtailed, including information on the proceedings of the legislatures. In the latter half of 1976 the progressive journals *Mainstream* and *Seminar* were shut down. Although it declared India to be a "socialist republic", the ratified 42nd amendment to the Constitution was aimed at strengthening the executive power at the expense of the legislative and the judicial.

The Supreme Court of India declared invalid the judgement of the Allahabad High court in the Indira Gandhi case, and by a majority vote the Parliament twice, in 1975 and 1976, passed a resolution to postpone the general elections for a year. Authoritarian tendencies increased within the government and the leadership of the ruling party. An attempt was made to effect India's transition to presidential rule.

Gradually in the course of 1975-1976 a so-called "extra-constitutional centre" took shape in the power structure, headed by Minister of Defence Bansi Lal and the Prime Minister's son Sanjay

Gandhi. The latter, though neither a member of the Government nor the leadership of the Congress, took charge of the activities of the ruling party's youth organisation. The honours accorded Sanjay Gandhi during his trips around the country became, according to press reports, a measure of loyalty to the Prime Minister. The campaign of forced sterilisation, to which about ten million persons, basically petty officials and the urban and rural poor, primarily Moslems and untouchables, fell victim, aroused wide discontent.

The influence of the Left-Centrist forces within the ruling party weakened, especially after the dissolution of the Congress Forum for Socialist Action. Beginning in autumn of 1976, the leaders of the Congress Party began to carry out a propaganda campaign against the Communists. Relations between the two parties became strained.

Somewhat unexpectedly, parliamentary elections were announced in January 1977. The opposition was let out of prison. (Many leaders of the opposition had already been released in 1976). This decision was taken in view of both internal and external factors. The leaders of the Congress were evidently trying to use to their advantage the positive results of the twenty-point programme, the favourable state of the economy in 1976 as well as the support of big business, in whose benefit a consistent policy of liberalising governmental control of economic activities had been practised since 1973.

Yet the negative aspects of the state of emergency (including the suppression of the strike movement and of freedom of the press, the programme of forced sterilisation, etc.) paved the way for a portion of the voters' break with the Congress. The number of the CPI's seats also decreased, the anti-Congressional voters' bloc having unfolded an extensive campaign against it, tried to identify the CPI's policies with those of the ruling party.

The main opposition forces (Congress (O), Bharatiya Lok Dal, Jan Sangh, the Socialists and a Socialist grouping headed by Chandra Shekhar) were able to form a united election bloc (called the Janata Party). On the eve of the elections part of the Left-Centrist forces headed by one of the Ministers—Jag Jivan Ram—left the Congress as a sign of protest against Sanjay Gandhi's activities and formed a new party, the Congress for Democracy (CFD). This party, like the CPI(M), came to an understanding with the Janata Party during the elections.

In February 1977 the President of India, Fakhruddin Ali Ahmad, died.

The March 1977 parliamentary elections resulted in the victory of the Janata Party bloc, which received the absolute majority in the Lok Sabha. Indira Gandhi resigned and Morarji Desai became Prime Minister.

At the beginning of May the parties making up the Janata bloc, as well as the Congress for Democracy, formally united as the Janata Party. Chandra Shekhar became its president.

The elections to the legislative assemblies of nine states held in the



summer of the same year again resulted in the victory, though with a smaller majority, of the Janata Party, as well as other groupings which had formed a bloc with it; the CPI (M) in West Bengal, Akali Dal in the Punjab and the All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam in Tamilnad. N. Sanjiva Reddi, the Janata Party candidate, was elected India's new President in July 1977.

The country entered a difficult period of regrouping of political forces. The struggle between the supporters and opponents of Indira Gandhi in the Congress Party intensified; centrifugal tendencies appeared in the new ruling party as well. Attempts by politically dissociate Leftist forces such as the CPI and CPI (M) and by Leftist factions in the Congress Party, Janata or other parties to achieve mutual understanding and co-operation became an important factor in the country's political life.

The worsening economic situation since the end of 1976 and a new spiral in the inflationary increase in prices began to have their effect on the mood of the masses. At the plenary sessions of its National Council in April and October 1977, the Communist Party called for an all-out effort to solve the country's pressing economic and social problems on a democratic basis and for a mass movement of working people for their rights.

The August 1977 session of the Working Committee of the Janata Party confirmed its orientation towards the building of a socialist society in India. The restrictions on democratic freedoms introduced during the emergency were abolished, a significant number of the Naxalites were amnestied and released from prison and the government set up several commissions to investigate abuses during the emergency. At the same time reactionary communalist Hindu and Moslem forces renewed their activities. A wave of terror against the rural poor (the lowest, untouchable, castes), incited by the landlords and rich peasants, swept across the country.

During the last months of 1977 the ideological and political struggle intensified in both the opposition camp and the ruling Janata Party itself. A polemic arose within the CPI and between the CPI and CPI (M) on the appraisal of the state of emergency and the Communist Party's attitude towards the Congress Party during this period and after the 1977 elections. The struggle within the Congress Party between the supporters and opponents of Indira Gandhi's group led to the party's formal split in January 1978, when two nationwide All-India Congress organisations were formed, led by Brahmananda Reddi and Indira Gandhi respectively.

The intensifying struggle within the Janata Party reflected the complex class composition of this political union, which, like the Indian National Congress, represented diverse, often diametrically opposed interests: the top strata of the propertied classes and, above all, the big bourgeoisie, petty traders and entrepreneurs and the rural elite, as well as the democratic strata of Indian society. The situation within the Janata Party was further complicated by a struggle for

influence in the governmental and party apparatus among factions representing the political components out of which the party arose in early 1977.

This was the situation when the Janata Party's economic programme was published in November 1977. It gave priority to the development of agriculture and small-scale industries. The broad discussion aroused by the programme reflected India's unsolved economic, social and political problems in all their complexity.

#### FOREIGN POLICY

As before, the focus of India's foreign policy in the mid-seventies remained to be the relations with the Republic of Bangladesh and Pakistan. India furnished Bangladesh with considerable material aid, supplying various kinds of materials, goods, food products and so on to help restore industrial and agricultural production in the country and settle the millions of refugees returning to their homeland from India. Most of the aid was gratuitous; furthermore, loans were provided, some of them in convertible foreign currency. Acting on the treaty of friendship and the trade agreement, which was signed in 1972, both sides successfully developed their economic and political relations.

Certain difficulties arose in the relations between India, Pakistan and Bangladesh in connection with the repatriation to Pakistan from India of Pakistani prisoners of war and interned civilians, of Bangladesh citizens in Pakistan and Pakistani citizens in Bangladesh. In April 1973 an Indian-Bangladesh declaration was promulgated providing for simultaneous repatriation of all three categories of civilians and servicemen. This document lay at the basis of an Indian-Pakistani agreement reached in August of the same year. On April 30, 1974, India completed repatriation of 93,000 Pakistani servicemen and civilians.

The further normalisation of relations between India and Pakistan was promoted by Pakistan's recognition of Bangladesh in February 1974. On India's initiative a meeting between the ministers of foreign affairs of all three countries was held in Delhi in April 1974; it resulted in the signing of an agreement outlining the ways of normalising relations between the three countries and establishing a stable peace on the subcontinent. In September 1974 talks between India and Pakistan were held in Islamabad which resulted in the restoration of telecommunication links between the two countries beginning on October 15 of that year. Mutual trips by citizens of India and Pakistan were also reinstated. In December 1974 the embargo on trade between the two countries, introduced during the Indian-Pakistani conflict in 1965, was ended and, finally, an agreement on the restoration of diplomatic relations between India and Pakistan was reached in May 1976. At the same time an understanding was arrived at on the renewal



of normal air, railway and ground communications between them. In July 1976 the two countries exchanged ambassadors. But the further development of relations between India and its main neighbours to the West and East was complicated by the military coups in Bangladesh in 1975 and in Pakistan in 1977.

Besides Pakistan and Bangladesh, India endeavoured to strengthen and develop its relations with other neighbouring Asiatic states. In 1973 there was an exchange of summit-level visits to Nepal and Sri Lanka. In January 1974 an agreement was reached with Sri Lanka on the citizenship of 150,000 stateless persons of Indian origin living in Sri Lanka, by which half of them received Indian citizenship and the other half, Sri Lanka's citizenship. In the same year the land boundaries with Bangladesh and Burma and the maritime boundaries with Indonesia and Sri Lanka were demarcated.

India failed to improve its relations with China to a more or less significant degree, which had been strained ever since the 1962 Indo-Chinese conflict. The attempts made by the Indian diplomacy in this direction did not meet with proper understanding in Peking. The existence on Chinese territory near the Indian border of military bases at which detachments of rebels active in Nagaland and a few other areas of North-East India were trained and armed hampered the normalisation of relations between the two countries. In April 1976, however, an agreement was reached on the restoration of diplomatic relations between them at the ambassadorial level. But this did not lead to a turn for the better in Indo-Chinese relations as a whole.

In the seventies, as in the past, India occupied one of the leading positions in the group of non-aligned countries within the system of international relations. Indian diplomacy continued to follow the Nehru line, taking an active stance against colonialism, neocolonialism, racism, apartheid and imperialism, and supporting the peoples of Vietnam, South Africa and Arab countries who were the victims of Israeli aggression.

Following its traditional policy of positive neutrality, India continued to support detente, the establishment of a stable and lasting peace and universal disarmament. India's voice was raised at international forums, particularly in the UN and its specialised agencies, whenever issues related to the economic and social development of Third World countries, commercial and economic relations between developed and developing countries and the establishment of a new world economic order were under discussion. It favoured the development of economic and commercial ties among the countries of Africa and Asia. In line with this policy there was a considerable increase of trade between India and Iran in 1973-1974, when Iran substantially increased its shipments of crude oil to India, after granting it a special loan. There was also an exchange of summit-level state visits between the two countries.

While pursuing its policy of positive neutrality India actively participated in the movement of non-aligned countries. Indira Gandhi

took part in the conferences on non-aligned countries in Algiers (1973) and Colombo (1976). The creation of a press agencies' pool to weaken the influence of the West on mass media in the developing countries was the theme of a conference of ministers from non-aligned countries held in Delhi in 1976.

The government and broad segments of the public in India continued strongly to oppose the building and expansion of an American military base on the island of Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean. India wanted to transform the Indian Ocean into a zone of peace, free from foreign military presence.

The Diego Garcia issue undoubtedly complicated Indo-American relations, which had considerably deteriorated during the Indo-Pakistani conflict of 1971. But starting in 1973 both sides tried to improve their relations, particularly after the end of the US "freeze" on economic aid to India. The settlement of the issue of the enormous rupee funds to the account of the US Embassy in Delhi accumulated as a result of shipments of American foodstuffs to India was an important milestone in Indo-American relations in the seventies. India was transferred the right to spend the major part (two-thirds) of the funds, totalling 22,500 million rupees, while 5,000 million rupees were to be kept by the American side and the rest was to be cancelled by India in convertible foreign currency. In October 1974 US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger visited India and signed an agreement on the creation of a joint commission on economic and scientific co-operation. In spite of these positive changes in Indo-American relations between 1973 and 1977, they did not reach the level they had been at in the 1950s and first half of the 1960s.

India's relations with the United States, as with other developed capitalist countries, were primarily determined by its interest in developing commercial and economic relations with the West and receiving economic and financial aid from it. Starting in 1974 India was afforded new long-term loans from the Aid India Consortium. The energy and financial crisis which hit the capitalist world in the mid-seventies aggravated the contradictions between India and the developed capitalist countries, as did the penetration into the Indian economy of multinational corporations from Western countries and Japan, which stepped up her battle for the Indian market with her Western European and American competitors.

India's re-establishment of diplomatic relations with Portugal in late 1974 was an important step in its relations with Western European countries. It was followed by the signing of a treaty in Lisbon in June 1975 in which Portugal recognised India's sovereignty over Goa and other former Portuguese enclaves in India.

Friendly co-operation with the socialist countries in the first half of the 1970s paralleled the complications arising in the economic and political relations between India and the West. During this period India's trade turnover and economic, scientific, technical and cultural co-operation with the countries of the socialist camp expanded, as did



their political contacts: state visits were exchanged between heads of state and governments and ministers of foreign affairs from India and all the socialist countries during the same period.

Soviet-Indian co-operation, based on the 1971 Treaty on Peace, Friendship and Co-operation, played an important role in strengthening India's political, economic and military independence from the West during these years.

The visit to India of General Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU Leonid Brezhnev in November 1973 was an event of great historic importance in the development of friendly relations between India and the Soviet Union. In the Joint Indo-Soviet Declaration signed during the course of Leonid Brezhnev's visit and the summit talks in Delhi, the Soviet Union and India confirmed their resolution to continue to promote detente and improvement of the international climate and spoke out in favour of ending the arms race, achieving universal disarmament and organising a worldwide conference on disarmament, as well as the prompt and complete elimination of colonialism and racism. In one of his speeches Leonid Brezhnev gave a high appraisal of India's foreign policy: "India was one of the pioneers of the non-alignment movement and contributed to the formation of its progressive principles. Action against colonialism and racialism, opposition to imperialist military blocs, support for the peoples fighting for national liberation, adherence to the principles of peace and peaceful coexistence—all this has won deservedly high prestige for India's policy."\*

Besides the Declaration, the visit resulted in the signing of other important documents: the agreement on further economic and trade co-operation for fifteen years; the Agreement on Gosplan-Planning Commission Co-operation; and a Consular Convention.

Both Leonid Brezhnev's visit itself and its results reflected the high level of Soviet-Indian relations, resting on the traditional friendship between the two countries.

Provision was made for the extension of metallurgical combines built with the help of the USSR in Bhilai and Bokaro, and the construction, with Soviet aid, of new oil-refining, non-ferrous metallurgy, coal-mining, gas extraction, electrical power, shipbuilding and other enterprises, as well as co-operation in the fields of electronics, space exploration and the development of atomic energy for peaceful purposes.

India's growing scientific potential ensured favourable conditions for the development of scientific co-operation between the Soviet Union and India. In 1974 India carried out an underground nuclear explosion for peaceful purposes and in April 1975 the first Indian satellite, the Araybhata, was launched with the help of a Soviet rocket. The USSR Academy of Sciences provided Indian scientists

\* L. I. Brezhnev, *Following Lenin's Course (Speeches and Articles, 1972-1975)*, Moscow, p. 362.

with samples of lunar soil collected by Soviet research vehicles on the surface of the Moon.

In 1974 and 1975 long-term agreements were concluded on Soviet-Indian co-operation in the natural and social sciences.

Soviet-Indian co-operation steadily continued to expand between 1974 and 1977. In a speech at the 25th Congress of the CPSU in 1975, Leonid Brezhnev spoke of Soviet policies with respect to India in the following terms: "We attach special importance to friendship with that great country."\*

By the mid-1970s the Soviet Union had become India's most important trading partner.

Between 1953 and 1976 the trade turnover between the two countries grew more than 300-fold, topping the 9, million rupee mark. Over 80 industrial works, including the biggest metallurgical enterprises in Bhilai and Bokaro, thermal and hydroelectric stations, oil-drilling and processing enterprises, coal mines, heavy machine-construction plants, medical equipment and pharmaceutical factories, were built in India with Soviet aid.

Eighty per cent of metallurgical equipment, 60 per cent of heavy electrical equipment, 30 per cent of smelted steel, 20 per cent of electrical energy, over 50 per cent of oil and 35 per cent of petrochemical products came from enterprises built with Soviet aid.

Economic co-operation between the Soviet Union and India was one of the decisive factors in the creation of an industrial complex in India based on a developed state sector.

The new government of the Janata Party which came to power as a result of the general elections in March 1977 announced its intention to continue on the traditional foreign policy course, and the new Minister of Foreign Affairs, A. B. Vajpai, demonstrated the continuity of the country's foreign policy during the first thirty years of its independence. The foreign policy moves of Morarji Desai's government in the latter half of 1977 confirmed its adherence to the policy of positive neutrality and its aspiration to improve and develop relations with all countries, both near and far. Friendly relations with the USSR have been looked upon as a matter of prime importance. In April 1977 USSR Minister of Foreign Affairs Andrei Gromyko visited India. A communiqué published at the end of his talks in Delhi said in particular: "The two sides expressed their satisfaction with the development of the time-tested relations of traditional friendship and co-operation, of mutual respect and confidence that have been established between the Soviet Union and India."

The further development of relations between India and the USSR was secured during Indian Prime Minister Morarji Desai's visit to the USSR in October 1977. The Joint Soviet-Indian Declaration signed on October 26 in Moscow outlined the prospects for the continued

\* XXVth Congress of the CPSU (Documents and Resolutions), Moscow, p. 25.



development of ties and contacts between the two countries in all fields—political, trade and economic, scientific and technical, and cultural. Morarji Desai's visit took place during widespread celebrations in both countries of the 60th anniversary of the October Revolution and the 30th anniversary of India's Independence.

The Declaration contained a comprehensive evaluation of Soviet-Indian co-operation. It observed in particular that "the two sides note that Soviet-Indian friendship has stood the test of time; it is not subject to transient considerations and serves as an important factor of peace and stability in Asia and in the world.

"Both sides expressed their satisfaction with the development of the relations of traditional friendship and co-operation between the USSR and India in the spirit of the Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Co-operation of August 1971, which reliably serves the interests of the Soviet Union and India."

Thus the development of friendly relations between the Soviet Union and India continued to be one of the most important directions of India's foreign policy and a decisive factor in the stabilisation of international relations and the movement towards a universal and lasting peace.

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